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HOW EAGERLY YET FEARFULLY I BROKE THE SEAL, AND READ.

THE CREOLE SISTERS; Or, THE MYSTERY OF THE PERRYS.

BY MRS. ANNA E. PORTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CURIOUS STRANGER.

It was half-past four in the afternoon by the old clock that stood in the corner of the dining-

room. Just thirty minutes before the stage-coach had come winding round the river road, and over the little bridge that spans the river, where it curves so gracefully, and runs with such good will over the broad dam by the factory that stands at the foot of the little hill, from the top of which there is a fine view of the village street. The careful driver always lets his horses walk up this hill, and then with a prolonged blast from his horn, and an extra flourish of his whip, at which the horses hold up their

heads, prick up their ears, and having been well taught their lesson, and conscious that many eyes are upon them, trot at a rapid pace to the head of the street, where the postmaster, in all the importance of his official dignity, awaits the mail. Then the horses turn round, and, in a moment after, are standing at the tavern porch, where they quietly await their release to the stables.

Do the village people ever weary of a stage-coach? Its entrance into the village each day is gazed at as if it were a new sight, and it certainly is a pleasant one to most of us, for it is the link which binds us to the world beyond our village.

Thinking it full time for the mail to be changed, and my husband being absent, I threw on my shawl and hood and went to the post-office.

I received my mail and was hastening away, when I heard a voice say:

"Oh, madame, I can't read it at all!"

"Good reason why, it is French," was the answer.

"What shall I do? Can't you help me, madame?"

There was something so earnest and pleading in the tone, that I instinctively turned back to look at the woman. Then, for the first time, I was struck by her face; it was not black, like the negro's, but unlike any mulatto's that I ever saw; it had indeed a reddish hue, and instead of the wool which usually adorns the African's head, I observed this woman had hair almost straight, quite long, and rather coarse. As I looked at her, there was an expression of disappointment and sadness, that was exceedingly painful to me; but I read in a moment that the features might easily wear a far different look. Her head was well set on the shoulders, and carried haughtily, and the firm-set lips betokened decision and will. *Fearless* was the word that occurred to me, and I thought that she was a person whose ill-will I would not care to encounter. She was wrapped in a large blanket-shawl of gay colors, and her bonnet was coarse black straw, trimmed with red ribbon. She drew her blanket closely round her as if she felt the cold, and indeed, I saw her shiver as I stood holding the door open.

"Perhaps you can help her," said Mrs. White to me. "Let the lady see your letter. I presume she reads French."

The woman handed it to me, and I read aloud as follows:

"HAVRE, Oct. 10th, 18—.

"Mrs. —:—

"MADAME—A package for you remains in this office. By transmitting five francs, according to law, it will be forwarded.

J. LE FEVRE,

"Postmaster, Havre."

"That means," said the postmistress, "that a letter has been deposited in that office for you, but it was not prepaid, according to law, and you can have it by sending five francs. We can obtain it for you, if you wish."

"Thank you, thank you, madame, please do so; and this lady, many thanks to you for reading the letter."

I replied that she was welcome, and was hastening away, when Mrs. White said:

"Mrs. Perry, please stop a moment and look at my cactus here; it is in full bloom."

As she spoke the stranger turned and looked full in my face, and then I understood the impression which I had received from her features a few moments before. In that look was mingled scorn, defiance and anger. I actually shuddered and felt my blood curdling, but I managed to compliment the cactus, which was brought forward for my inspection, and whose rich crimson blossoms would have elicited much greater admiration a moment before, but which received only a glance of contempt from the colored woman. I hurried home, haunted all the way by *that look*.

I had been married but a few months; long enough, however, to begin to feel quite at home, and prize highly the little spot which bore that name.

The sitting-room was still warm when I entered it, and the last ray of sunlight lingered at the western window to bid me good-evening. In a few moments I prepared supper, in case my husband should be at home earlier than the hour named.

Some one entered—it was not he, but his brother Maurice. Let me draw his portrait, though I can hardly do him justice as he looked then. A man between forty-five and fifty, just in that ripe manhood when a handsome man appears to the greatest advantage, and Maurice Perry's face and figure were such as most painters delight to put on canvas. The head was well-shaped, the hair, which was not abundant, of a soft, silky brown, and lay well off from a tolerably broad but not very high forehead; the eyes were blue, shaded by well-arched brows, mouth small, and lips full—in this respect almost like a beautiful woman, and many a woman has envied our brother Maurice his fair skin, which no summer's sun could spoil, and the delicate color of the cheek which even time leniently spared.

His voice was well modulated and sweet-toned. It lacked strength, many said, but he was a good pleader, and often won his cause by the persuasiveness of his silvery tones. He was never hurried, never off his guard, always cool, self-possessed, and one word followed another like young girls marching to low, sweet music. How handsome he looked that evening as the light of the astral fell on his fine face, and how bright his smile!

"All alone, Mary?"

"I am expecting Sidney every moment; he has gone to Brown's on business."

"It is a bad night for him to be out; he is not strong yet."

"I was thinking so. I hope nothing has detained him—he thought he would be at home at seven, and it is now quarter past."

Maurice smiled.

"Young wives are anxious. In a few years fifteen minutes will not seem so long to wait."

Maurice was Sidney's only brother, and much the oldest; he was a widower, living not far from us, in the old stone mansion of the Perrys, while we occupied a cottage which had been added to the landed estate.

The only dwellers in the stone house at that time were Maurice and his housekeeper, Miss

Hannah Price. This latter was an important personage, having been in the family from the time of the elder brother's marriage. She was now near forty years of age, medium height, with very dark eyes and hair, the latter worn in side ringlets, which ringlets were in constant motion, as she had the habit when speaking of moving her head to give more force to her words. Her complexion was dark, her cheekbones high, and there was one peculiarity in her eyes which I noticed when I first met her—the inner angles were inclined downward, like those of a cat.

Miss Hannah, it is said, knew all the family secrets of the Perrys, and I had often observed her assume a mysterious, important air, whenever the family history was referred to.

Miss Hannah was what we Yankees call "smart;" the house under her management was always in order, and it seemed to me that dust and flies never dared to intrude upon her premises. The latter never found light enough, save when the Squire occupied a room, to live at all. In summer, sunlight was as rigorously excluded as if it were a thief in search of the silver, and many were the contests between Fanny and Miss Hannah on this subject. Fanny was Maurice's only child. She was at boarding-school at this time, much, I think, to Miss Hannah's relief; for, though I could not judge myself, having never seen the child, yet Sidney said she was a complete little Southerner—quiet and indolent usually, but, when roused, furious as the tornadoes of her own clime. Her mother was a Florida lady. Somewhere between the years 1818 and 1820, Maurice had been sent on some commission, by Government, to Florida, where he remained a year or two, and when he returned, brought with him a beautiful bride. She lived but a few years, leaving one child—Fanny—whose resemblance to her mother was said to be very striking.

I surmised that my brother-in-law had some object in calling this evening, and of this I became certain after my husband's arrival. While I prepared tea, the two conversed together in low tones. Soon after, the judge went away, and I waited for Sidney to explain, but he only said how tired and chilly he was, and I asked no questions.

The next morning, I was surprised at receiving a call from Hannah, who was not over-friendly, usually, to me.

"I came over to ask a favor, Mrs. Perry," she said, as she seated herself, and placed her basket by her side. "You see, the Squire is going a journey to-morrow, all of a sudden. I didn't know a syllable of it till this morning, at breakfast, and he is to be gone eight or ten weeks."

"Sidney has said nothing about it," I said, with a little surprise.

"He did not know it, probably, for yesterday's mail was detained by the storm, which is more violent South of us than here, and the Squire didn't get his letters till this morning. I had just been making him a dozen new shirts, and completed them, all but the button-holes. I don't get much time to sew, except evenings, and, as my eyesight is not good, I left these for a bright day. So here are all the dozen shirts without a single button-hole, and I came to see

if you could aid me a little. The shirts are rough dry, so that I can starch and iron them this evening. I wouldn't have troubled you at all if Aunt Posey had been at home, for she could do them up; but the Squire thinks that nobody in the wide world but myself and Posey can prepare his linen."

I had never seen Posey, though I had a great curiosity to do so. She was originally a slave in Florida, and came with Maurice's wife, at the time of the latter's marriage. Within a few years, she had married Ned, a smart, industrious, free negro, and they had bought a small farm, about three miles from the village. Being somewhat noted as a cook, she had obtained a place in one of the White Mountain hotels, where she usually spent the summer, and was often kept as late as November, as she was very efficient help in other departments besides cooking.

"Is it possible you are on the second shirt, Mrs. Perry?" said Miss Hannah. "How fast you sew; and they are made nicer than I can make them."

Now my *forte* was sewing, and I was glad that Miss Hannah was candid enough to give me due credit.

"I can do them all easily, Miss Hannah; and now suppose, as there is a good fire and hot water in the kitchen, that you make some starch, and thus have them all ready to iron in good season."

The idea pleased her, and, though I shrunk from having my pantry and kitchen scrutinized by those sharp eyes, I was glad to do her a favor.

Just before tea-time, Maurice came in to bid me good-by, and was quite surprised to see Miss Hannah so familiar in my kitchen. He accepted the invitation to remain to tea, and while Miss Hannah was preparing it—for she begged me to continue my sewing—he told that he was going to Florida on business, and would be absent some weeks, perhaps months.

"But there is war raging now," I said, "between the whites and Seminoles. Are you not afraid to venture?"

"No," he said; "my mission is peaceful;" but never, since I had known Maurice, had he appeared so sad, absent-minded; and when he was not speaking, I noticed, at some moments, an appearance of anxiety and trouble.

It did not escape Miss Hannah's observation.

I was not so observant as Miss Hannah; but, in some other way I can hardly explain, I was sure that Maurice was in perplexity of some kind; but when he rose to bid me farewell, his graceful manner and kind adieu led me to wish that I might know his trouble, and alleviate it if possible. I was sorry he was going. I should miss his social visits during the coming winter evenings.

When he was gone, Hannah remarked, with a peculiarity of emphasis which she meant me to notice, that "she should think the judge was the *last man* who would want to visit the Indians on a peace mission;" adding—"Let him beware!"

CHAPTER II.

POSEY'S CABIN.

A FEW days later, I heard that Posey had arrived, and I resolved to pay my respects to her the first bright afternoon. Taking my way down the river-road, and striking off into the wood, I soon came out into a cleared bit of ground, in the midst of which stood her white-washed house and barn. The first object I perceive, is a little child, with a woolly head, round face and bright eyes, lying down on the floor, gazing at the fire, the very picture of "taking one's ease."

A step further, and I see on one side of the fire a woman, sitting very still, with her hands clasped on her knees; and she, too, like the child, looking into the fire; but there is something in the attitude, though I can't see the face, that does not speak the content of the child—attitudes have their expression. That can't be Aunt Posey, for the hair is long and straight. My step rouses her; she turns, and I meet the face of the dark woman that I had met a week before at the village post-office. I involuntarily shrunk back, for I remembered that look, and dreaded to meet it again. But no, there is no such look now; but the whole expression of the face is one of deep sadness—almost despair. Not the look that most of our race have, however, when in trouble, as if appealing to you for sympathy. No, there was something in this woman that bade me keep my distance. I felt it as much as if she had said at once, "My sorrows are my own; meddle not with them." She did not appear to recognize me, nor did she move; but fixed upon me a penetrating glance, as if she would read my very soul, and there was a response within me which said, "Read it, my poor woman; it is guiltless of aught toward thee, but a wish for thy peace."

Another inmate was roused by my step on the threshold, and came to meet me. I knew Aunt Posey at once. She realized the ideal which I had formed of her from Sidney's description. She was quite fleshy, with a full, round, good-natured face, that seemed to say the world had gone well with her. She wore a very gay turban, large rings in her ears, and gold beads that looked very bright in the folds of her sable neck. She had on at this time a gay-colored calico, and together with her pleasant smile and warm welcome, was quite a picture of cheerfulness.

"I'm glad to see you, ma'am," she said, as she shook warmly my offered hand. "I knowed at once who you were, 'cause Mr. Sidney 'scribed you to me, and when I heard you sing in meetin' last night, my heart warmed toward you right away. You sung it so cool and sweetly like:

'Come all ye weary souls oppressed,'

that I couldn't help the tears a-comin'. I was right in the corner behind you. But walk in and take a seat; you must be tired if you've walked all the way from the village; the quality ladies don't walk much in these parts; but dear me, if they could only see the autocracy up in the mountains, they'd maybe find out what legs and feet were made for. There, sit down there if you please," she said, as with one hand she lifted the little contemplative urchin from the

floor, and dropped him into a basket in the corner, from which his bright eyes peered at me in wonder, and with the other hand she shook up the cushion of a chintz-covered chair, which chintz was radiant with great yellow butterflies and red roses.

"How is Mr. Sidney now?" asked Aunt Posey; "he hasn't been himself since he had the fever."

I remarked that he was not quite as well, the late bad weather having affected him unpleasantly.

"Does he cough any?" she asked.

I was obliged to acknowledge that he did, "a little," just a very little—only a slight hack."

"And he's thin as a shadder," she added.

"He must try and flesh up before winter comes, or the cold wind will find its way to his bones. I must nurse him up a little. He thinks a great deal of Aunt Posey's syrup, and I'll make him some this very day."

I told her that he had expressed a wish for some. Her eyes brightened.

"Yes, yes; when he was a little boy he used to come to me when he was sick, and say, 'Aunt Posey, I want some of your syrup, but none of the doctor's stuff.'"

I stopped a few minutes in Aunt Posey's garden, where a few autumn flowers still lingered, some brilliant marigolds and asters that had defied the autumn frosts. The old woman waxed eloquent in praise of her gourds and pumpkins, of which she had a great variety. One huge pumpkin she offered me as a seat, while I ate some early apples, she, in the meantime, sitting upon the grass, with the toddling little black fellow playing summersets around her. I ventured to ask Posey who her strange visitor was.

"I don't wonder you ask, ma'am, for she ain't like any of our folks about here, and she 'pears strange like now, after her long, wearisome journey. She is one of my old Florida folks, and kinder belongs to the family. She came when I was up to the mountains, and was mighty disappointed not finding me at home. You mustn't mind her strange looks, leastways if she shows them to you, for she has a grudge ag'in' the family, and she can't help showing it, for she's Indian, you see—most all Indian."

"But why should she look so fiercely and strangely toward me when we first met and were strangers?"

"Perhaps, ma'am, you were not such a stranger to her as she was to you—maybe she heard your name."

I remembered then that Mrs. White called me by name when she asked me to translate the letter.

"Was she a servant of Mrs. Perry in Florida, Posey?"

"Servant, ma'am! The like of her are never servants, and yet I think she has served some of them well. No; my mother was a slave in her father's family—that is, they bought her with their money—but she was more child than slave. I must be kind to Nehah, for she was good to those I loved. She is stern and cross now, but she has had trouble, oh, so much trouble, ma'am, that your heart would ache could I tell it to you—some time, perhaps, I will. But see, she watches us, and suspects me of talking about her."

Posey gathered me a few flowers, and I

walked home, wondering all the way, as I went, why Nehah should have any grudge, as Aunt Posey called it, against our family.

I asked my husband at dinner; he seemed to feel very little interest in the subject, merely saying that his brother Maurice had spent much time in Florida, and had some business in adjusting the Indian claim, and might have given offense to some of the chiefs, and the feeling had extended to their families. This seemed a partial solution of the mystery, but still it puzzled me, and, as I was much alone, I found myself thinking of Nehah, and wondering why she was here. It is something wrong to allow the mind to dwell upon one subject in this way, for trifles are magnified, and a morbid state of feeling is produced, which is far from agreeable. Whenever I introduced the subject to my husband, he as invariably turned it, and seemed to wish to avoid the matter altogether. I began to think he knew Nehah's history, and one day I abruptly said:

"Sidney, did you ever hear of this Indian woman before this fall?"

This question took him by surprise. He was agitated, and his lip quivered a little as he said:

"I never saw the woman. I cannot say I have never *heard* of her, for I believe she was connected in some way with my brother Maurice's family."

"Sidney," said I, "I never heard you say any thing about your brother's wife and her Florida friends. Do pray tell me all you know about them."

I thought it strange that since our marriage he had never, unless the subject was introduced by others, mentioned Mrs. Maurice Perry, and now I asked:

"Didn't you like her, Sidney? Was there anything strange or disagreeable about her that you avoid her name?"

A strange look passed over Sidney's face; the muscles seemed distorted. I was afraid I had stirred unpleasant memories; but he answered quickly:

"Oh no, she was one of the loveliest women I ever saw. You would have loved her. Don't you recollect her portrait in the east room?"

"Oh yes, a fair, sweet face, most lovely to behold," I said. "It must have been a change from her pure sunny Florida to this cold land."

"No doubt it was; but if you wish to hear Miss Flora's praises, and her picture painted in bright word colors, you must visit Aunt Posey. She had nursed her from her infancy, and when she died we feared poor Posey would never survive her loss. Her subsequent marriage, and the birth of her own child, were all that saved her life."

Here he turned the subject; but I was still further convinced by his manner that there was some secret history in the family. I was a wife of a very few months, and but little acquainted with my husband's friends. They were an old family, of good repute, and some influence, though my own Sidney was not wealthy. The bulk of the family inheritance seemed, somehow, to have gone to Maurice. Maurice's daughter I had never yet met, but was to do so soon.

CHAPTER III.

WHO WAS AGNES?

I WAS busy one morning in the breakfast-room, watching the egg-glass, that our eggs might be cooked to just that point which my husband liked so well, when the door opened suddenly, and the brightest little fairy that I had seen for many a day stood before me; or rather she didn't *stand*, but rushed up to Sidney and threw her arms around his neck, raining kisses in rich profusion. His eyes sparkled, and I saw that he returned the embrace with equal fervor.

"My own dear uncle Sid, how glad I am to get back again to you. I came late last night, and I couldn't wait to see you till I had eaten breakfast, and I wanted so much to see my new auntie," and before I could receive a formal introduction, the little rose-bud lips were pressed to mine.

"There, I knew I should love you. Father said you weren't handsome, but you were something better, and he was right. Please love me, because I haven't many to love, and it is so cold and lonely over home."

There was something bewitching in the young girl, and on my side it was really love at first sight. I knew it must be Fanny, our brother Maurice's only child, and I was aware of the affection Sidney bore toward her.

"Indeed, I will love you," I said. "Your uncle loves you so much, that I couldn't do otherwise than follow his example."

"Do you, uncle, though?" she said. "Oh, that's delicious! Do you know, auntie, I used to wish he wasn't my uncle, (that was when I was a little wee thing, and he petted me,) then, when I grew up I would be his wife—he was just my ideal of a husband."

"But your ideal has changed a little," said Sidney. "I'm afraid you would have broken troth."

A crimson blush covered cheek and brow, but she answered quickly, though with a look which suddenly became grave:

"I'd never break troth, uncle Sid, you know, I never would," and the little head with its wealth of curls was thrown back, and the tiny lips closed firmly, indicating a strong will in the little body.

"Come," I said, "we'll break eggs; they are among the few things that are better broken than whole."

"Oh, yes, I'd like to stay to breakfast. I suppose Aunt Hannah will scold, but never mind; I shall come to see you as often as I wish, if you will only let me. I don't love her, though she is so wonderful kind to me, for, don't you think, she wrote me that aunt Mary was well enough, she supposed, in her way, but she was a pale little woman, with wonderfully high notions, and not the kind of wife uncle Sid needed. I knew she had always said that such a gentle, retiring gentleman ought to have a dashing, energetic, showy woman—in short, her niece, Rosetta, with her flashing eyes and black curls; but uncle had another idea of a household divinity."

When we were seated at the table, I took the first moment of repose to look at Fanny and see

what she was like, for one might as well attempt to describe a bird in the air as the girl in her excitement. Now, I could see that she fulfilled my husband's promise of beauty. She had deep-blue eyes, shaded by long, dark lashes, so much like Sidney's that one would know they were related. They inherited them from Fanny's grandmother, for they were the same eyes that looked out so lovingly from the portrait in the parlor, which was so sacredly treasured. But, though she inherited the pure complexion and blue eyes of her Northern relatives, she had, instead of their calm cool temperament, the impetuous, warm blood of her Southern mother. Her lips were red and her cheeks rose-tinted, indicating what was the fact, that she had never known sickness. She was *petite* in form, lithe in limb, and unaffectedly graceful as an infant. Aunt Hannah said that she was terribly quick-tempered. Perhaps so; humming-birds are said to be, and I fancied she would be like one, if excited.

She had just come from boarding-school, to spend the vacation at home. "And only think," she said, "pa (pronouncing the word with the flat Southern accent) has gone, and hadn't time to write me a letter? What should I do, uncle Sid, if you hadn't married? But now we'll have nice times, auntie."

And we did have nice times. I soon grew to love her very much; she came to see us daily, and the weeks fled until winter was at hand.

With the cold weather, my husband's cough grew worse; until, one day, feeling much worried about him, I determined to seek out Aunt Posey, and ask her to prepare the syrup which she had promised to concoct for him.

It was a clear, frosty day; the ground was frozen hard, only now and then, in the sunniest spots, yielding to the power of solar heat; the sky was blue and cloudless.

I walked on, hoping that I should find Aunt Posey at home, and that the syrup wouldn't be long in the compounding. As I approached the house I saw Nehah come out of the door, but when she saw me she stopped, hesitated, looked this way and that as if she would avoid me. I think she could not have shrunk from me more than I did from her presence; but there was no avoiding the encounter; we must meet. I meant to be brave, and bowed, saying "Good-evening," but again that terrible look! There was concentrated in her face mingled scorn and revenge. I trembled violently, and had I met her a few rods back in the woods, I should not have expected a safe issue. The sight of Aunt Posey's house reassured me, and I passed by Nehah, receiving from her, however, no word or other token of recognition save *that look*, which haunted me for years. I was sure now that she bore ill-will toward me or mine.

I found Aunt Posey good-humored and cordial as usual, while, to my great delight, the syrup was bottled and ready for use. I sat down by the bright fire, while she bustled about in her hospitable way, bringing from some recess the glass of wine and slice of fruit-cake. Aunt Posey was a model of politeness and ease, and in striking contrast, I thought, to the manners of many of the would-be ladies in Burnside. When I had rested a little, I rose to examine

the delicate water-color painting which had interested me so much in my former visit. The second examination only excited my curiosity more, for it seemed almost faultless, and must have been sketched and painted from nature.

"That is a beautiful little painting, aunt Posey."

"Do you think so, honey? It's delicate like, but seems to me full blown roses and pinies are handsomer than them little things that take so much time to look at. But you haven't drank your wine; it's good for you, and these tiny glasses hold only a thimbleful. Drink it, and let me give you some more; it will warm you up this cold day."

"Thank you, auntie; one glass is enough, and I enjoy drinking it slowly. It is very nice, too good to drink in haste."

I rose to go home, but she begged me to wait one moment while she brought her shawl and bonnet to accompany me, "for it was lonesome like in the woods," she said. I thought of Nehah, and willingly consented. As I stood waiting, my eyes fell again on the little picture, and I detected in one corner, in pencil, the words, "Agnes, to Flora."

Flora was Fanny's mother. The fair artist must have been a friend of hers; in this way Aunt Posey came in possession of the picture. Fanny told me that her mother left many little mementoes to her faithful servant.

"Aunt Posey," I said, just as we entered the edge of the wood, "do tell me more about the strange woman that has been staying with you. It seems to me as if an evil spirit looked out of her eyes whenever I meet her."

"Never mind Nehah," said my companion, cheerily. "I told you that she had Indian blood in her, and you know the Indians is a mighty queer people; when they take up notions they stick to 'em allers. But she'll not trouble you any more. She went away to-day, and maybe never will come back. But her family were kind to me and mine, and I never will refuse her shelter while I have a home. You know I came from Florida with Miss Flora when she was married."

"So I have heard. Pray tell me about Mrs. Maurice Perry."

"Why, honey, she was one of the beautifulest, sweetest, dearest little creters God ever made. Fanny is putty and gay like, but she isn't such a real angel-pictur' as her mother. It was the hardest thing I ever did to lay her in the grave; nobody else had ever dressed her, and I couldn't let 'em do it for the last time. She was too young to die. But there she lay, just like one of my white rosebuds, broken off before it had fully opened—dear me! dear me! I prayed to God, when she was sick, to take me instead, and she heard me, the darling did, and she said: 'No, no, Posey; it is God's will that I should die, but be kind to dear little Fanny. If I could I would take her with me.' The little thing was too young then to understand death, and thought her mother was only sleeping, when she lay so still and cold. Heaven has seemed a good deal nearer, honey, since she died—it's like as if I had a claim on it. I know she'll never forget Posey, even among the angels."

"Poor Fanny; it was a great loss to her."

"Indeed, indeed it was; but I'm so glad Mr. Maurice ha'n't married again; it would have come right hard for Fanny to call anybody else mother, and yet, it is kind of strange like; he's a raal lady's man—one of them that's wonderful taking among women. Mr. Maurice and my Flora were a handsome couple. I was proud of her, and, oh! honey, dear, I loved her too much—too much, I suppose, and God took her. We mustn't have idols in this world; but what can we do, when God sends angels to live with us?"

"It is hard not to love them," I said, "and harder if our love should cause their removal from us."

"I sighed, unconsciously, but Aunt Posey observed it, for she replied:

"I know what you sigh for. Yes, he's another of God's good angels that walk here below. It seems like our Father in heaven made a mistake, and dropped diamonds down, but takes 'em up again as soon as he finds it out. But, take courage, my Flora hadn't an enemy in all the wide world; but your husband it seems has, for Nehah has taken a great prejudice ag'in' him; but she'll not tell me anything about it, and it's no use trying to tease an Indian, you know. Some time I'll find out; so you be easy, for that is the reason she looks so hard at you."

It was not much relief to find my anxiety changed from myself to my husband, and yet, I trusted the mystery might be solved sometime by Posey.

We found Sidney at home, waiting tea for us, but very pleasantly occupied in singing with Fanny, who was playing on the guitar.

"There, auntie, I have done my duty to-day, and now I'm going to spend the evening with you."

She had played the housekeeper very prettily, and a nice supper was on the table. Aunt Posey insisted upon remaining to wait upon the table, as she used to do in the old days, she said, when Miss Flora was Fanny's age. After tea, Fanny sung some of the songs which had been her mother's favorites. Aunt Posey listened and cried. After she went away, Sidney also went out, and Fanny and myself had not long sat alone together, when, down went Fanny on the carpet at my feet, and up went the roses into her cheeks.

"Auntie, uncle Sid is a brother to me, and my dear mother trusted and loved him, and Aunt Posey says that, before she died, she told him to watch and care for me. He never told me of it, but he does care for me, and I tell him all my troubles; only now, just now, I am in trouble, and I am going to tell you all about it. Yes, I must tell some one; I cannot suffer all alone—I never could. Now, no one will come in this winter's night," and she drew her low chair close to me, "and uncle will be at the counting-house late. Now, please first look at this," and she drew from her bosom a miniature of a fair youth of perhaps twenty years. He was in *personnel* all that a maiden's heart could desire. I wish I could give my reader a colored photograph of Frank Ashley instead of this meager pen-and-ink sketch. At this time—and many years have passed since then—I remem-

ber the impression which the first view of the picture gave me. The hair was dark and abundant, the eyes dark and eyelashes very long, the contour of the face regular; the mouth firm and determined; but the expression of the face, taken altogether, was indicative of a happy temperament, of much buoyancy and hopefulness. I liked it: the sweep of the wavy hair across the brow, the easy position, the half *neglige* but not slovenly dress, all bespoke a free, frank temperament. I studied it awhile, and Fanny studied my face also very earnestly.

"Rightly named," I said; "that is a fine face; but I have seen many a handsome face that I did not like as well."

Fanny's eyes sparkled.

"I knew it; I knew you would like him!" she said, triumphantly; "and if—if you could only know him as I do, auntie, you would love him; love him, I mean, as a brother."

"And so, Fanny," I said, laying my hand on her head as she hid her face in my lap, "you have learned so early the lesson of love? I would rather that you turned over a few more pages of life's book before coming to that. It is to woman the key-note of her future. As you strike this now, so life will end. Couldn't you have waited awhile before entering the enchanted land?"

"Auntie, love came to me; I did not seek it. Frank Ashley came from Florida. His father is an old friend of my mother's family, and he was sent north to be educated; he came first to our house. We were playmates, and my father took quite a fancy to him, and sometimes called us brother and sister. He allowed our childish fancy to continue, and when Frank sent his first letters from the military school, pa was almost as much pleased as myself. It is only within a year that we have been forbidden to correspond, and pa gives as a reason, that he is unwilling I should be engaged so young, and adds that he will never consent to my marrying a military man. Now, auntie, until he forbade our correspondence we did not know that it was so essential to our happiness; until he told us that we must not think of marriage we had not spoken of it. True, I see now that pa was right in one respect, the friendship could have terminated in no other way; his harsh treatment only tore roughly away the veil which we should have slowly and tremblingly raised. I never shall forget the day when pa called me to his room, and asked if I had received a letter from Frank that week.

"'Yes,' I told him, and I would run and fetch it.

"'No,' he said, 'no matter about that,' he only wished to say that he thought I was old enough to drop the girl-and-boy correspondence; it might result in something more serious than friendship, and he should certainly never consent to my looking upon Frank as a lover. I must send him no more letters, and he would write to him and explain."

The reason of this sudden disapproval by Maurice Perry of his daughter's choice was thought, by others, to be caused by the loss of an expected fortune which an uncle had encouraged him to suppose would be left to him. The

uncle had lately died, and left him—nothing. As father and mother were both dead, and had left him but a trifle, owing to misfortunes by which their property was lost, poor Frank had no one to rely upon but himself. Neither he nor Fanny had supposed this would make any difference with their father; and indeed the youth of the parties was the excuse he gave for at present interdicting the correspondence. But whether one or both these reasons actuated him, there was in reality a third and more powerful motive, which none suspected, unless it might be his brother Sidney and old Aunt Posey.

At that time, Frank was attending the Academy at West Point, and there he still continued at the time of Fanny's present visit home. She had, indeed, been sent off to boarding-school only to get her out of the way of her lover. Her ten months' session had closed when she came home; and now the year of probation was over, for her father had stipulated that their intercourse should cease but for one year.

"Yet he is not here to dictate to me what course he now wishes me to pursue," sighed the fair girl, as I smoothed her lovely golden hair, as a method both of soothing her and attesting my sympathy.

"But, auntie, our year is out, and father told uncle that he would give his consent to our writing at the end of the year if we wished, though he added, 'There's no danger of their wishing it themselves; and as Frank will be ordered into service somewhere at that time, there can be no great harm in promising.' But see here, auntie!" and she held up before me a voluminous letter, that looked as if it might well be taken as a feast after a long abstinence. "Let me read you a little, auntie:

"This is my first letter, Fanny, for a twelvemonth, and I may not be able to get a letter to you for as long a time in the future, for I am ordered to Florida. There is work to be done there, and I shall see active service soon. This suits me. Write by next mail; it will be the last you will direct here."

At this poor Fanny broke down, and hid her head in my lap, while the tears flowed freely.

"And you have written?"

"Yes, auntie, I have; but I didn't know as it would be quite right. Father is not here, you know. You must tell uncle Sid; and you—do you think it was wrong?"

I spoke as my heart dictated when I answered, "No. But," I added, "Fanny, it is a fearful thing to disobey a parent. It is sad to marry without a father's blessing. Little good comes of it."

"But when the time comes he will give us his blessing—he must, auntie; he can not deny it. But one thing more. He will come here before he goes; only one day, auntie, just one day; and may he come to see uncle Sid? And will you be an auntie to him, too?"

"Be sure, child, it would be the best that he should do so. Your uncle will think with us, I have no doubt."

It did my heart good to see how much this little arrangement pleased Fanny, and how safe and trustful she seemed. Only two days, and Frank would be here! I hadn't been married long then, the reader will remember, and I en-

tered into the hopes and fears of these two young lovers with all the enthusiasm of a bride in the honeymoon. I little thought then that the one day of Elysium that I was preparing for them was to be succeeded by so much sadness.

Frank came. I liked him, for he was a generous, high-spirited boy, and gave promise of a fine manhood. I thought brother Maurice must be proud of him. It was a bright day for the lovers; the sun shone, the sky was blue, and everything favorable for a walk to Aunt Posey's. The afternoon was given to this, they promising to return to supper. During their absence, Aunt Hannah and her niece Rosetta called; the latter in her gay city costume, which was almost overpowering in our low, plain dwelling. Aunt Hannah wore her sternest look. I perceived that she did not approve of the proceedings at our house, and I was a little amused in speculating how she would express her displeasure. I was not long in doubt, for she was one of those persons who pride themselves on their plain speaking.

As Aunt Hannah at length rose to go, she remarked:

"You know, Mrs. Perry, I have been a long time in the family, and I am accustomed to speaking my mind. You are only making future trouble for Fanny by permitting Frank Ashley to visit here. I think it's my duty to give you my mind upon the subject."

"Thank you, Miss Hannah. I have done nothing without my husband's approval."

There was a sneer, a very palpable one, on Miss Hannah's face as I said this.

"As to that, Mrs. Perry, all young husbands are influenced by their wives, and in your case there is no exception. Indeed, it is said, and perhaps you might as well know it, (the truth never hurts us,) that you govern your husband. Mr. Maurice says that his brother Sidney is becoming quite a decided character now that he is guided by his wife."

I did not reply for a moment. I was mortified and angry, but, fortunately, I caught sight of my husband, and checked the retort that rose to my lips.

"Oh, there's Sidney," said Miss Hannah, quickly, "I must tell him what his brother said about Master Frank."

I was glad to be released, but I was not pleased to hear my husband's name so familiarly used by Miss Hannah. I did not hear what she said, but it evidently did not disturb him at all, for he came in smiling, and remarked to me, as I was busy cutting my choicest fruit-cake for my guests:

"Will you accept an addition to your supper?" and he handed me a can of oysters.

I forgot my vexation in my hospitable cares, and was myself again when Frank and Fanny entered, looking fresh and happy, as if they had been drinking the elixir of life, as indeed they had.

Frank was to leave in the coach that evening, which in those days left Burnside at the unseasonable hour of ten at night. As the time of parting drew near they grew more and more silent. Sidney had gone out to buy a warm scarf for Frank, as the night was chilly, and I

slipped quietly away to my own room. In less than five minutes the coach was at the gate, and Frank's voice answered to the coachman's "Whoa," "Ready."

"Where's aunt Mary?" I heard him say.

"Here, Frank. Good-by—God bless you."

"God bless you, aunt Mary. Don't forget me."

He could say no more, nor did he turn toward Fanny, or speak another word, but ran out and sprung into the coach. Poor boy! like many others of his age, he was ashamed of his emotion.

For some time after this it was a common thing for me to detect the traces of secret tears on Fanny's face, though she tried to be very cheerful.

Aunt Posey and I had become very good friends, an intimacy which seemed to please Fanny, who often accompanied me in my walks there. I was sorry to see that the little water-color painting had been removed to give place to the great fruit-basket which now rejoiced in its gilded frame. I had taken such a fancy to the more delicate sketch that I proposed to myself to change with Aunt Posey, giving her instead a school-girl performance of my own, being nothing less than a vase of flowers on white velvet, which all my companions pronounced "magnificent" when I completed it, and I well remember the triumph I felt when I carried it home from school to display to my father; it was incredible, the amount of gamboge, carmine, Prussian blue and chrome yellow I had lavished upon it. Years had sobered my estimate of its beauty, and it now hung in a little back chamber, the admiration of the damsel who assisted me in my household affairs occasionally. Aunt Posey had pronounced it "gorgeous," and a "little beyond" the fruit-basket. I should have proposed a bargain at once for the water-color, but really, my conscience was too tender; it seemed like giving glass beads to the Indian for the genuine "sable," of the value of which he is ignorant.

But one day, when Fanny was flying like a bird all over the house, hunting up something for tableaux, she spied this picture and brought it down, highly delighted with its gorgeous coloring. We were amusing ourselves with it, when I happened to think of my meditated exchange, and spoke of it, praising, as I thought it deserved, the little water-color. "It must have been given to your mother, Fanny, for in one corner are the words, 'Agnes to Flora.'"

"Oh, yes," she said, suddenly lowering her voice and looking sad; "that was my aunt Agnes, one of the most beautiful beings that ever lived, I suppose. I have not seen her since I was a little girl, too young to remember her, but I know my mother must have loved her very much. I can't tell why it is, but nobody ever speaks of her, and, when I ask Aunt Posey about her, she says, 'Oh, yes, honey, Miss Agnes was the delight of our eyes; but Miss Flora was my darling—and now they're both gone—both, and Posey is left alone; but it is your mother, chile, I want to talk about, and you needn't ask me nothing about Agnes, because she wasn't my pet, you know.' I never heard father mention her name, though I knew she spent some

years with my mother. I once asked Aunt Hannah if she remembered her, and she replied, 'To be sure; don't I know everybody that has lived in this house for twenty years?'"

"Was she handsome, Aunt Hannah?"

"No, not what I call handsome, but some folks that I know were mightily taken with her. She didn't suit me with her Southern ways and her high notions, and I was not sorry when she went back to the South, and I have never heard a word from her since your father returned from there about two years after your mother's death." Aunt Posey tells me that she's dead. I had a miniature of her, auntie, and a sweet face it was; but one day father gave me a miniature of my mother, and I asked him or uncle Sidney to put that in the gold locket, instead of aunt Agnes, and I have never seen auntie's since. It was very careless in me to lose it so."

"I am sorry, Fanny, for I have a strange interest in the painter of that sketch. I wish I could get it."

"I wouldn't like to ask Aunt Posey for it. She is very generous, but any relic of my mother's family is most sacredly cherished by her, and she looks so grave when I talk about aunt Agnes, that I have thought best to say nothing to her about old times. I think our family are fated to sorrow."

"Nonsense, Fanny; don't talk about 'fate.' We make our own fate, and are not miserable unless we make ourselves so."

Fanny shook her head. "I have a notion, auntie, and it is so fixed that it would be difficult to eradicate, that our family are doomed to misfortune. You are so quiet and even that they must have done something very wrong in years that are past; perhaps in the days of the old Spanish Knights (for my mother was Spanish by descent) some deed of violence was committed for which we must atone."

I laughed heartily. My little Fanny was really getting into a romantic and unhealthy mood.

"Come, now, Fanny, let us get out of these low, dark rooms, and go out and watch the workmen? Isn't it delightful to see our home progressing? What merry times we'll have at the 'housewarming.'" For we were having a new house built.

Fanny followed me, but the shade on her brow did not clear till we had been some time out in the sunshine, listening to the chat of workmen, who were as merry as they were busy.

I began to waver in my rejection of all presentiments the next day, for Fanny received a letter from her father, requesting her to be ready in a week to go to Bethlehem to school, where he had made arrangements for her remaining a year. My husband also received a letter, wishing him to accompany her, pay her bills, etc.

So Fanny went away again, and I was left much to myself, while Sidney was at his counting-house. During those lonely hours I often asked myself—for I seemed to be haunted with some vague and strange idea of her—"who was Agnes?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIDNIGHT BURIAL.

THE spring opened finely. Warm days softened the hard earth, and gave fresh verdure to hills and fields.

Life had never seemed so bright before, for Sidney was feeling strong and well. Aunt Posey said that was a good sign, for "consumptive folks always felt weak and faint like, the first spring-days," but she still insisted upon the use of certain herbs at this time of the year, sassafras tea in particular; and packages of it nicely cleaned was sent to us, with bottles of distilled mint and wintergreen.

The spring ran on into summer. For weeks my home was an Elysium to me. I was busy all day, and wished the days were longer, that I might accomplish more. It was the same with my husband; his business occupied a large share of his time, and the remainder he spent on his garden and the house; but in the latter occupation we were much together, and found such congeniality of taste, that we desired no other society.

I can not now recall any alloy to the happiness of that summer; life has some such serene spots on which memory loves to dwell. I had little society, for we had no near neighbors save Aunt Hannah, and she was having the mansion to herself, cleaning, sweeping, scrubbing to her heart's content. She was a thorough house-keeper, merciless toward all dust and litter, and her tongue had learned a lesson from her broom, for toward all idle or easy women, who didn't spend their days in cleaning, it was a besom of destruction.

Aunt Posey had been at the mountains for some weeks, but was coming home the first of September. I missed the good woman, though had she been here, I could not have taken my usual walks, for my exercise was limited to my garden.

I had now a little handmaid to assist me in my domestic tasks.

"Now, Bettie, I want you to get up a nice little supper this evening, make some coffee and muffins, and have peaches and cream; Mr. Perry is very tired; he has been busy ever since five o'clock this morning, and he promised he would stay at home and rest this evening."

I said this to my little domestic, who was never happier than when she could be thus employed. I had the papers and a new book to read, and Sidney was to lie upon the sofa and rest while I read. It was a cool but pleasant evening, just a little fire on the hearth, enough to make the old sitting-room cheerful.

Our table was laid there, and I sat waiting—it was time for him to come. I threw on my shawl and went out to meet him; he was not in sight. I walked on till I came to the factory. It was a pleasant spot, near a large brook, where the waters rushed over high rocks, between moss-covered banks, now in their greenest verdure. I stopped, as I always did, for the scene was picturesque; my husband said that he discovered new beauties every day. Indeed, I forgot my errand for awhile, till I heard the counting-room door shut with a heavy sound, and turning, saw the boy who had the care of the room. He came toward me with a note in

his hand, saying, "I was just going to your house with this; Mr. Sidney bade me to take it to you, as he was called away suddenly." I took the note, and read:

"DEAR MARY: I shall not be at home till late this evening, as business will detain me. Do not wait supper, and go to bed at your usual hour. God bless you, my darling.

"Your affectionate husband,

"SIDNEY."

The note was hurriedly written, and I fancied in some agitation, caused, perhaps, by perplexity in business, but I was sadly disappointed, and walked home with a slow step, dreading the long, lonely evening that must follow. I had no desire for supper; but as I entered the house the fragrance of Bettie's coffee tempted me, and I drank a cup before sitting down to my reading. [I went in the strength of that coffee many hours.]

Time passed, and in reading "The Lady of the Lake," I half-forgot my disappointment; but when the clock struck ten, I began to feel lonely and tired. "Surely he will come soon," I said to myself, "for he was never away so late before." I thought of poor wives left alone at night, and husbands returning with reason half dethroned by a midnight debauch. Thank heaven, I had no such sorrow to apprehend! Why, then, should I be impatient because of a few hours' delay? I thought I would go to bed and sleep, but something, perhaps the coffee, made me wakeful. I sat in the rocking-chair, looking out on the deep yard, with its large elms and stately poplars, watching the shimmer of the moonlight as it gleamed on the grass, sketching the form of the boles and boughs. It was very still, not a sound, not the rustling of a leaf, the note of a bird, or even the tinkling of the sheep-bells, a very common sound from the neighboring hill. The silence oppressed me; I became restless; my ear was sharpened, and every nerve excited; I even fancied poor Mrs. Smith gliding about among the trees, and—I couldn't be mistaken—there was a sound now, a low, but articulate sigh near me, right under the old elm!

I could endure it no longer; and snatching my shawl and bonnet, I threw them on and went out, hardly knowing or caring whither I went. It was near midnight—cool, as I before said, but very pleasant; I walked on rapidly, and turned—I never could tell what prompted me—into the river road leading to Aunt Posey's.

I hurried till I had to stop a moment for breath, just at the entrance of the wood. That gloomy forest road lost suddenly its terrors, and I went on as fearless as if it were midsummer noon; but if any one had stopped me, and asked me whither I was going and what I wanted, I should have been puzzled how to reply. As I emerged from the wood and came in sight of Aunt Posey's house, I was astonished to see lights burning, and two or three men standing outside of the door. Their backs were toward me, and thinking to avoid them, I turned into a little path which led to the garden at the rear of the house. There was a little hill back of the garden, where Posey had erected a structure which she called her summer-house. The grape-vines trained over it were still green,

and formed a canopy to shelter me. I entered, and sat down to gain breath and think a moment, for I was now thoroughly ashamed of the nervous haste which had driven me from home, and wished myself back again, but was too timid to retrace my steps. I forgot this, however, and everything else the next moment, in the scene that presented itself to me. The door that led from the large kitchen to the garden was open, and as I sat, I could see all that was passing.

What was my surprise and consternation at beholding in the center of the room a coffin, from which the lid was removed, and though I could not see the features, I perceived that the corpse was young and fair, and laid out with much care and taste.

The small white hands were folded on the breast, but beneath them, as if they still guarded it in death, lay something small and oval. I could not tell what, as it was partially concealed. I was so absorbed, that for some minutes I noticed nothing but the corpse, and the longer I gazed the more clearly could I see, for a small round stand was at the head of the coffin, on which were a number of lighted candles. I thought the sleeper there must have been very beautiful. What can this mean? I said to myself, and changed my position a little, that I might see who was in the room, when, leaning against the mantle-shelf, at the head of the coffin, pale as the corpse itself, I beheld my husband! For a moment I was dizzy and faint, but an intense desire to solve the mystery, and fear lest I should be discovered, gave me strength; but I trembled violently, and had to sit down upon the floor and lean my head against the wooden bench. Soon an indistinct murmur of words reached my ear. I bent forward; there was our pastor, Mr. Harmon, in prayer.

My first impulse (it was a good angel's whisper) was to walk quietly into the house and kneel by Sidney's side. He seemed much agitated. I was his wife. Ought he to conceal any thing from me? I rose, went forward a step or two, but a feeling of pride detained me. He has concealed it from me; I will not pry into his secrets. Oh, God! this is hard to bear; I have not one thought but he shares—no past secrets to hide from him. Can it be that he has built a cold, dead wall between my heart and his?

I crouched down again, overcome by a dull, heavy pain, that never left me afterward. Still, eye and ear were strained to the utmost. Now I could see all in the room, and there, in the very abandonment of grief, sat Nehah on the floor near the coffin. She was not noisy, nor violent, nor was she even weeping; but her attitude, her face, her whole figure expressed hopeless sorrow; no one would think of trying to comfort such a mourner—they could only pray, and leave her with God.

So changed was the expression from that which I had always seen on her face before, that I forgot myself and every thing else in pity for her grief. When the prayer was over, some one, a stranger to me, removed the lid of the coffin from where it rested by the side of the table, evidently intending to screw it down. Nehah perceived the intention, and sprung up, throwing her arms over the corpse, and bowing

her head, as if to prevent any one from bearing it away. The man hesitated and drew back, and every one in the room seemed afraid to disturb her. Just then her eyes fell on the treasure which was guarded by the hands of the dead. She drew it forth—I thought it was a miniature case—and, with angry gesture, flung it upon the floor. The motion opened the spring, and I saw then that it was a miniature, or rather two, and some tresses of hair. Aunt Posey gathered them up, and handed them to my husband; he laid the hair in its place, closed the spring, and going to Nehah, whispered something in her ear. She turned and looked at him fiercely for an instant, and then, as if seeing what, alas! my quickened sense of sight saw only too keenly, the pale, sad look and falling tears, she raised herself and stood erect, but still close to the coffin.

Very gently Sidney removed her a little, then laid the miniature in its place, folded the hands again, and after one long, sad look, full of tenderness and love, turned away and went back to where he had stood leaning before. Nehah resumed her old place, and the same hopeless expression, as if life had no more joy for her.

Then came the last duties. Two men bore the coffin away, and my husband, as chief mourner, followed alone, then Nehah, and Aunt Posey. There was a burial-ground near, known as the "Old Hill," a very sweet, retired spot. My eyes followed the little procession, and I was again half tempted to go and join my husband. I felt sure that he would be kind and gentle; it was not in his nature to repulse any one, surely no one who trusted him. Why did I not do this? I am sure now that an evil spirit led me to Aunt Posey's that night, but a loving, pitying angel suggested my joining the mourners, and mingling with the procession. My pride, nothing but that, and vexation that my husband should have one secret from me, held me back. I had been excited, and unconscious heretofore how cold the night had become. I shivered, and wrapping my shawl around me, went homeward, but with a burden of sorrow that I never again laid down.

My own room never looked so desolate before. Mechanically I moved about, first replenishing the fire, for I remembered that Sidney had neither overcoat nor shawl, and that cold night walk to the grave! The thought made me shudder. Then I made a cup of tea, and drawing an easy-chair to the fire, and laying his dressing-gown and slippers near, I undressed and went to bed. I could not have drank the tea myself, nor did I feel that I could sit up and meet my husband's eye, or talk with him that night. I trembled violently when I heard his foot upon the stairs; but perhaps he will explain all, I said to myself, and the thought quieted me. He opened the door. I did not speak, but he came toward me, bent over and kissed me with more than his usual tenderness, (he was never very demonstrative,) and said:

"I am glad you did not sit up for me, Mary. I had no idea I should be detained so long. How thoughtful you were to make this tea: I feel the need of it."

He then put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and sat down to warm himself and drink his tea. He was very cold and tired, and I

could understand very well why he did not feel like talking. He was restless for some hours, but toward morning fell asleep. I wondered he could sleep at all—I could not, and rose early, leaving him still sleeping, but he looked pale and haggard.

I waited in silent suspense for some days, hoping for an explanation of that night-scene. None came. To be sure, Sidney was unusually busy; that week, the water-wheel in the mills gave way, and a new one of peculiar structure and pattern that they had never used before was to be put in; the workmen did not understand it very well, and my husband, who had great fondness for machinery, and understood readily the most complicated, was very active in assisting about the wheel. Twice within that week he came home so wet through that he had to change every garment. The exposure, and probably the excitement with it, soon brought on his cough, his appetite failed, and he became weak and dispirited. It was hard for me to be cheerful, for ever before me was the face of the dead, and my husband bending so fondly over it.

One day he was so ill that he did not go to his business, and we remained in our room. Now, thought I, he will surely tell me all, for I sat by his side sewing, many hours. But though kind and thoughtful as ever, he was more than usually reticent. Once he took up my work, examined it curiously, and smiled as he laid it back, saying:

"Mary, I trust we have much happiness in store for us. I can't tell you with how much pleasure I look forward to another spring."

My eyes filled with tears. I could not answer him, and I arose on some slight pretext and went to the other side of the room. It is strange that when I had no cause whatever, I would joke and tease him about having loved, and expressed doubts of his own affection. But now, when I had such serious doubts and fears, and a foundation for them, I was fearful lest I should betray myself by one syllable of reproach. So wayward is woman.

"How long since we heard from Fanny," said Sidney, not taking any notice of my silence.

"Surely," said I. "I wonder I did not think of it. We should have had a letter last Monday. I'll go to the post-office myself. I heard the coachman's horn an hour ago."

In five minutes I was at the office, and the postmistress handed me letters, saying, as she did so:

"I haven't seen you for a long time, Mrs. Perry. You don't come to the office as you used to do."

"No," I replied. "I have had so much gardening to do this summer that I find sufficient exercise at home."

"How beautifully your place is looking! Your husband will make a little paradise of it. It is quite changed now, and when the old house comes down we sha'n't know the 'old Smith lot,' as it used to be called."

"Did you know Mrs. Smith?" I ventured to ask, for I saw she was inclined to gossip, and I for once departed from my usual reserve.

"Know her? Yes, quite well, for she was so often at the office—you know my husband has

been postmaster for twenty years. Now Mrs. Smith was very fond of writing letters, and seemed to be afraid to have her husband mail them. She was a sad, suspicious, unhappy woman; but we see a great many queer folks here at the office. That reminds me now of your meeting a strange woman here one day, a good many months ago; she had a letter in French, and you translated it for her. Do you remember her?"

Did I remember her? The thought of her made me feel sick and turn pale, but I answered as a woman is very apt to do:

"I think I remember her."

"She wasn't any of our sort of folks, and my husband says she's part Indian, and he knows, because he's lived among them. At any rate there's something very strange in her conduct, and there's some mysterious reports round the village about her. Have you heard of them, Mrs. Perry?"

I confessed I had not, but I could have told the woman more than the reports had told her.

"Well, you know she disappeared from here about as mysteriously as she came, and during the last week she returned, bringing with her the dead body of her daughter—at least so it was said. At any rate, there was a burial, and there is a new-made grave in the 'Old hill.' But some folks think it isn't all right, and threaten to open the grave. For my part, I think the matter ought to be looked into. To be sure, Aunt Posey is one of the best creatures in this world, but she may be imposed upon, you know."

"Has any one questioned Aunt Posey?"

"Yes, to be sure; and she says everything is all right, and that the dead was dear as a child to the strange woman, and wished to be buried here, and the poor, lone thing has had a world of trouble, and only longs for death that she hopes will not annoy her any more."

"I think we may trust Aunt Posey," I said, turning to go.

"Yes, yes, to be sure, but I don't like these mysteries; it seems a dreadful thing to dig up a dead body, but I'm really afraid they'll do it."

"Oh, I hope not!" I replied, with more warmth than I intended.

The postmistress eyed me closely, for an instant, but evidently thinking it was my horror at having a grave opened for such a purpose, she said in a softened tone:

"Well, it does seem bad; perhaps they'll not do it."

The least mysterious occurrence in a village spreads like wildfire. Many whispered words were circulated that week, and reached us through Betty. I told her one day that I wished her to go to Aunt Posey and ask her to come and assist in a large washing the next day. I wanted all the curtains, bed-linen, etc., clean, preparatory to removal.

"If you please, ma'am, I'd like to go early, so as to return before sunset—there's strange stories about now'days, of ghosts in the woods, and of coffins being seen there at midnight; indeed, ma'am, I'm most afraid to go at all."

My husband was present; he sat on the sofa reading his paper; he had not been out for some

days. At another time he would have smiled and made sport of Betty for her fears, but now he looked up from his paper and said, quietly:

"If Betty is afraid, send John; he is at the mill."

I bade Betty go to the mill and ask John to do the errand. Sidney made no remark after she went out. It was evident to me now, that he never intended to reveal his secret.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG SOLDIER.

IN the mean time, Frank Ashley was learning harsh lessons in soldier life. The Seminoles in Florida were at open warfare with the whites. Maurice had returned from the South, and gave us much information about the war, but none of Frank.

"I am hoping now," said Maurice, "that we shall have less trouble. Osceola is taken; while he was at large, there was no such thing as subduing the tribe. I see no way but to send them out of the territory or utterly exterminate them. It is the destiny of the race, and the mock philanthropy now so common is misplaced kindness. The Seminoles are like wild beasts, furious and pitiless, and should be driven from their lairs in the swamps of Florida, where they secrete themselves only that they may issue forth when opportunity occurs to plunder, ravage and destroy the whites."

As for Fanny, she grew ill, in her Moravian school, from suspense and 'hope deferred'—so ill, that it became necessary to allow her to receive word of her lover, who now wrote some account of his experiences. Everywhere, and in both families, the same mystery seemed always to be coming to light, only to be pushed out of sight again. Frank's letter was full of it.

"I have at last seen war, and must give you an account of my first battle. It was at Okechobee. We had one thousand and thirty-two men. After four days' march down the west side of Kissiminee, we came to a swamp which separated us from the enemy. This swamp was three-quarters of a mile broad, and totally impassable for horses, and you can judge whether agreeable for the pedestrian, when I add that it was covered with a thick growth of grass five feet high, and was knee deep in mud and water. But we crossed it, I can hardly tell you how, and were met on the other side by a heavy fire from the enemy. The contest lasted from half-past twelve until after three, and was very severe. We had twenty-six killed and one hundred and twelve wounded. Don't turn pale, dear Fanny, when I tell you that I was wounded, but not fatally, as this letter proves. Of five companies, there were only four men left uninjured. Colonel Thompson received two balls from the enemy's fire during the early part of the engagement, yet he continued to give orders with as much coolness as if he were only on parade duty. But a third ball proved fatal. 'Keep steady, men; charge the hummock! Remember the regiment to which you belong,' were his last words.

"We conquered, but it was a dear-bought victory: for after the battle, in that desolate

hummock, lay one hundred and twelve wounded officers and men. There were no ambulances for the sufferers, and we were a hundred and forty-five miles from civilization. Mine was a flesh wound, and I had fainted and fallen from loss of blood. But I remember that on recovering a little and opening my eyes, I saw the soldiers constructing rude litters out of poles and dry hides which they had taken from the enemy. The poor, weak horses looked too feeble to bear them, but I longed for my turn to come, for I was afraid they would overlook me, and I should be left on the ground, as I could not speak to call their attention. I lay in a wet, swampy place, almost concealed from view by the tall, coarse grass. I tried to rise, but the exertion was too much for me, and I fell back senseless. I rallied again in a few minutes, and, looking round, could not see a single soldier. The feeling of horror and desolation that came over me I can not well describe. The next minute I found myself gently lifted up and borne away on a rude but comfortable litter. I was sure that the bearers were squaws, but I was too faint to care for any thing save being left in that desolate marsh to die alone.

"The next thing of which I was conscious was having my wounds dressed by a tender and skillful hand; then some liquid was given me, which I drank without reluctance. It was probably an anodyne, for I fell asleep and slept I know not how long, but when I awoke I found myself in an Indian tent, lying on skins. A gourd of water was by my side, and a melon. But I saw no person. I seized the gourd and drank the contents eagerly, nor did I hesitate to eat the melon, for in truth I was ravenously hungry. I then rose, determined, if possible, to find out where I was, and rejoin the regiment as quickly as possible. I pushed aside the poor old ragged canvas that formed an apology for a tent, and was surprised to find the scenery around me strange and new. I seemed to be on a ridge, or island, in the middle of a great cypress swamp. The vegetation around me was so dense, that the sun could not penetrate, save to the ridge on which the tent was pitched. All around me was a swamp, covered with green, stagnant water, a lurking-place for snakes and alligators, but the valley of death for man. I stood irresolute, more ready to encounter the fire of the enemy than the loathsome reptiles that I knew were hidden in the swamp. As I looked eagerly out in search of some path or trail, I heard a voice near me say, in good English:

"Don't hurry, Master Frank; when you are strong enough I will guide you across the swamp, and show you the white man's camp, and then you can return to kill the poor Indians who have no safety save in such swamps as these."

"At the sound of the voice I had turned, and saw, sitting on the ground, a woman whose face I shall never forget. It haunts me even in my sleep. She seemed neither Indian nor slave. Her hair was long and black, but she had not the high cheek-bones of the Seminoles, nor the reddish tinge to the skin. The face had something of the Spanish contour, but the eyes were her most remarkable feature—large, dark, and

piercing. When she spoke of my 'killing the Indians,' there was a fire and flash in them that gave token of an untamed soul within; but, in a moment, that expression passed away, and was succeeded by a sad, hopeless look, that was almost despair. Alas! alas! I said to myself, why, indeed, are we hunting to the death this remnant of a once powerful race? Why not let them live the little time that remains for them? They are doomed to speedy annihilation without the aid of the white man's powder.

"But they kill us, too," I replied to my companion, who ceased her employment of pounding corn and listened to me. "Yonder swamp was filled with the dead of our army only yesterday."

"Yes," she replied, "and it will be harder yet for the pale-faces; the spirit of the Indian is aroused, and, if he is driven from the land of his fathers, he will mark his track with blood."

"Why, then, did you spare me? Why did you bring me here, wounded and helpless, when a few hours' exposure in yonder swamp would have made one less white man in Florida?"

"Listen to me," she said, while her countenance softened, and an expression awakened by some pleasant memory made it almost beautiful. "Your mother was my friend. While she lived I never knew hunger, want or sorrow. She, too, had a dear friend, the companion of her childhood, and when she died this friend filled her place, and was dearer to me than my own life. The blood of Spain ran in the veins of both, and though mine mingled with the darker hue of the Indian, and hers with the colder current of the Saxon, it was no bar to our love. I was a chieftain's daughter, and born to a wide inheritance of swamp and everglade, islands and rivers. But the white man came and took possession. My father was driven from his fertile lands, by the Ahapopka lake, to the swamps beyond the St. John; they hunted him as if he were a wild beast, and he fled southward, but they followed, and he went westward till the ocean stopped his flight. They took him at last; they bound him—the brave, free man that scorned fetters—and sent him from the land of his fathers toward the setting sun. But the iron entered his soul; he died before he reached the home where his eagle heart and strong arm could plan and fight no more for his nation. He lies near the great river; he crossed its waters only to die. But his avenger lives, and every day some pale face dies in memory of King Philip's wrongs."

"Stop a moment," I said; "are you King Philip's daughter?"

"She drew herself up proudly. 'I am Nehah, a king's daughter; but, many a time in your infancy was your head pillowed on my bosom, and many a night have I watched over you when your mother was too ill to guard you herself. Could I leave you to die—her child? You lay upon the ground, faint and bleeding, wounded by one of our tribe. I saw your fair young face, pale in death, as I at first supposed, and a great pang came to my heart, for I thought how the wicked man, your enemy and mine, would rejoice. I brought you here; I laid you on the skins, that you might die here, and be buried where no wild beast might come.

But it was only a swoon, and when you recovered I saw your mother's smile and heard her voice—'

"She stopped suddenly and turned her ear, as if listening. I could hear nothing, but suddenly she seized my arm and drew me within the tent, and bade me, if I valued life, to secrete myself among the skins.

"Coacooche may have had the white man's fire-water, and then he knows not what he does. Wait till he has slept, and then he, too, will forgive much for your mother's sake."

"She was so earnest and decided in her movements, that scarcely was I aware of her intention before I found myself inside the tent, and back to my bed of skins, which was screened by a piece of canvas. Like the rest of the tent, however, it was full of holes, and I could easily see the approach of an Indian on horseback. He was a noble-looking chief, not tall, but well proportioned, with every limb molded to the most perfect symmetry. As he sprang from his horse, a very fine bay, and stood a moment with one arm carelessly thrown around his neck, it seemed a group for a sculptor. Both horse and man were worthy an artist's chisel. He had not imbibed the fire-water, for his voice was clear and soft, and his speech very fluent. His sister came toward him, rather deprecatingly, I thought: but as she spoke in the Indian language, I could not comprehend her. It was evident, however, from the chief's manner, that he was not displeased, and when Nehah pointed to the tent, he gave a nod of approbation, and then began some relation of the battle, evidently, for I caught the names of our brave officers who had fallen. His gestures were rapid and violent—his dark, expressive eye, full of fire. What we thought a victory on our side, he viewed as one on his, or at least a drawn battle.

"When he ceased talking, Nehah took his horse and proceeded to perform all the duties of an expert hostler, while the chief threw himself down just inside the tent, as if very weary. How he managed to get through that swamp with his horse puzzled me very much. When Nehah had finished her care of the horse, she prepared food for the chief. He ate voraciously, as a soldier who has known the hunger of the battle-field can eat. Then he laid himself down and slept. I had been in war long enough to know that it was the sleep of a man who had known no rest for many nights.

"After a while Nehah came to me, and bade me rise and come out of doors. It was a mild evening, the moon was shining brightly, and the swamp that had looked so full of death to me in the broad sunlight, lay sleeping quietly in the softer rays of the moon, the hidden death still lurking there but the eye saw it not.

"Coacooche is brave—he is generous," said Nehah. "He remembers your mother, and gives you shelter in his tent. But the tribe hates your nation; they will kill Coacooche if he is kind to you. You must go from here. I will show you the edge of the swamp, and point the way to the white man's camp."

"But tell me first, Nehah, what you meant when you said your enemy and mine would rejoice at my death. I do not know as I have an

enemy in the world. Who is he? Where is he?"

"Nebah's eyes were fierce as a tiger's when he glares upon his prey. I started back half frightened, for I had roused a lurking devil in her.

"Don't ask me now," she said, "there is not time to tell you of the past. If we ever meet again I have much to say to you; if not, God will protect you, for your mother loved him. She tried to teach me forgiveness and patience, but I never learned the lesson, and never will; but I promised—not your mother, but her, *her*, the victim, the wronged, whose life he sacrificed—that I would not harm him. But I have longed for his heart's blood, and I dare not trust myself in his presence lest I should forget my vow."

"She turned away hastily as she spoke, not giving me time to reply, but soon returned, leading Coacooche's horse, and hastily made me mount.

"I will guide you through the morass," she said, "and then you must trust to yourself; but the white man's camp is not far distant, and all Coacooche's band are at a distance, in safety. If you have no honor, you can betray my brave brother Coacooche into the hands of your soldiers. No other white man knows the way to his hiding-place."

"Nebah," I said, "you have saved my life; you were my mother's friend. Could I betray you or yours?"

"I do not fear it," she said, abruptly, "and even if you should, it would be only making a life doomed to sorrow a little briefer."

"I was mounted before I was aware that she was going on foot as my guide; but no persuasion could induce her to change, and she spoke as a nurse to a child for whose welfare she was responsible.

"You will be tired enough," she said, "before to-morrow night. We must improve this moonlight; ride on slowly and with care."

"I soon learned that she was right, for the way was long, circuitous, and in some parts almost impassable. But, the horse was familiar with it, and carried me safely through, Nebah walking by my side and pointing out every obstruction. It was near morning when we came to the edge of the swamp, and I saw in the distance the track by which our soldiers had come, and the battle-field where I had laid in those hours of suffering and suspense.

"Now go," said Nebah; "you have no time to waste; and I must hasten back to Coacooche before he misses his horse."

"I dismounted, and finding in my pocket a gold piece, the only money I had, I offered it to Nebah. She gave me a bitter look of scorn. 'And do ye think it is for money I would serve her child?'

"Before I could answer, she had turned and ridden away, and I stood, vexed with myself, and sorely regretting that I had not learned more of her history, and was exceedingly puzzled to know what she could mean by her enemy and mine. I trust the fortune of war may throw me again in her path.

"I had a long walk in a hot sun, and reached our camp at nightfall, where I was received as one risen from the dead, for I had been reported as among the slain. An opportunity occurs for

sending to Washington, and I must close, hoping to be able to write you again soon; meanwhile I leave you to puzzle over my mysterious adventure.

Yours truly,

"FRANK."

This letter, which Fanny inclosed for my perusal, was a more perplexing puzzle to me than to her, none the less so because I recognized one of the actors—"Nebah!" To be sure that was a common Indian name; there might be many Nebahs, and how could the woman whom I saw only a few weeks previous be the same who so kindly cared for Frank? And yet, improbable as it seemed, I was sure it was the same woman. Those eyes that had such power over Frank were the same that I had encountered in our village post-office. I sat long that night pondering over the mystery. I knew that Frank's mother and Fanny's had been friends in their girlhood, and united by the ties of the Spanish blood, of which they were both a little vain.

Sidney read the letter, but made no remark, save that he was glad that Frank had found friends among the Seminoles. The war, he added, would be long and bloody, for the Indians were becoming more savage, and the whites more desperate as the difficulty of reclaiming their slaves increased.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSING PAPER.

THE early spring was now upon us; not the bright, joyous spring of a more southern climate, but the cold, wet, windy days of March, far more trying to an invalid in New England than the cold of winter, which, as I have before said, often invigorates the system. I could see that Sidney had lost instead of gaining. Poor Aunt Posey was too well versed in sickness not to know it, but she said:

"It's only the cold, wet spring, honey. Keep up courage till the warm, sunny days, and then you'll see how fast he'll gain. Keep up courage!"

We had moved into our new house, and had, too, a sweet little babe—a boy—born just before Christmas. If only my husband had been stronger, I should have been perfectly happy, despite the secret which I was still so anxious to learn.

"Do hurry and get well, dear uncle Sid," wrote Fanny, "for papa is so stern and cold that I have no comfort in his letters. He has forbidden me to write again to Frank. Poor Frank, dying perhaps in the swamps of Florida. One thing is certain, now. I'll never marry any one but Frank, and if papa forbids our union, when I get my education, and he has won his honors, why, then if it is wicked to disobey, I will go into the convent. Yes, I will take the black veil, and will live thinking of the past, and longing for the time when I shall fold my hands in death and be united to Frank in heaven, for I am sure he will never marry any one but Fanny, unworthy as she is. I suppose aunt Mary thinks I am a willful child, and that my father seeks my good alone, but I only wish that she and her Sidney were so situated for awhile, and then we should see. Didn't Frank have quite an adventure in Florida? I can't thank God enough that He put it into the heart of that Indian woman to take care of him. Ask uncle to remember all he can about my mother and her family, for I do not dare ask my father. Then there's Aunt Posey, who always knows more on

every subject than she will communicate; do get her to tell you all about my mother's friends. I know that Frank's mother and mine were very dear to each other, and this Indian *must* have known them both. When I was at home there was a strange woman at Aunt Posey's. From something said, I surmised that she was from Florida, and was partly Indian. If she is there, do find her out, and learn what you can from her."

I had commenced reading this letter aloud to Sidney, and I did not stop, though I know my voice trembled during the last two sentences.

"I could tell Fanny much about her mother," he said, "that she might like to hear. She was a lovely creature, graceful in person, and with much sweetness and goodness of temper. Her life was short here but I learned to love her as a very dear sister."

"But about her family, Sidney, do you know anything of them?"

"Yes, they were of Spanish descent, and among the first settlers of Florida; rather exclusive, a little haughty, perhaps, and possessed, at one time, great wealth. My brother, you know, obtained much of his property through his wife."

"Is Frank's family connected with Fanny's? Is there any blood relationship?" I asked, thinking, perhaps, I had found the clew to brother Maurice's objection.

"No, none at all; for I recollect distinctly now, that when Frank first came there, I asked the question, and Maurice replied; 'No, but it is the old, chivalric attachment of race; the attachment between those old Spanish families is stronger than the tie of blood in our northern nations.' I should judge from Frank's letter that this might be so."

"Do you suppose Aunt Posey can give us any information about the strange woman that stayed with her a while? I must acknowledge that Frank's description of his Indian woman's eyes, reminded me of her."

I cannot tell the reader with what trepidation of heart I asked that question. It was an arrow shot at random, but it found a surer mark than the archer meant. Sidney rose and paced the room a minute before he replied. He was pale and agitated.

"Mary," said he, at last, with forced calmness, for I could see that his face was pale, and his lips trembled. "Mary, I am not ignorant that you suspect some mystery connected with myself, and that 'strange woman,' as you call her, who was at Aunt Posey's awhile since. You are too truthful, too thoroughly transparent in your character, for me not to have detected your feelings. My dear wife, you cannot hide your anxiety from me if you would. I have seen, I have known it all, and there have been times when I was resolved to con—to tell you a sad story, which might—no, no, that could never be—our love is too deep, too strong. It is founded upon a rock, and cannot be moved."

He stopped for a fit of coughing came on, and he seemed faint and weak.

"Don't talk any more now," I said. "There, lie down and rest; I am sorry I asked the question," and I bathed his head, forbidding him to speak another word.

"Yes, I must: one word more, Mary: don't

judge me harshly till you know everything. I believe with you, there should be no concealments between husband and wife. I did not mean there should be any, and there shall not long. Some day when I feel strong enough, I will clear up any mystery which may have perplexed and troubled you."

"Forgive me, Sidney," I said; "I did not mean to give you a moment's pain. I have tried you, sometimes, but I am ashamed of my teasing now and of my suspicions."

"There, Mary, no more tears," he said, as he drew my head down and gave me a kiss. "I'll rest now, and some time before long, we'll have a long talk, and I'll answer all your questions. You would rather have me answer them than seek any information from Aunt Posey, would you not?"

"I'll promise you, I'll never say a word to Aunt Posey on the subject," I said. "There, now, you'll not say another word. I am going to shut up the room, and leave you to sleep awhile, for I must look after the baby."

I took my babe, pressing it to my heart, and retired to my own room, where a good flood of tears relieved me.

One bright day in early April, when there came gleams of sunshine, and now and then a soft breeze from the South, Sidney said:

"I wish I had some wild flowers, some of the violets that grow in the old woods near where the brook runs—the old beech woods."

Aunt Posey, who knew the woods as well as she knew her own house, made thorough search and not one flower was yet in blossom; but from under the snow she dug some partridge berries and some trailing arbutus, while in our own garden we found pansies in full bloom, hidden under the snow. The next morning Sidney heard the robins sing, and he had his bed moved so that he could see the old apple-tree, on the branches of which they gave their morning concert. That night I remember that he was sleepless, and I sat by his side, reading. He tried to talk a little, but it tired him, and he said:

"Oh, Mary, I want one hour of strength to talk with you!"

"It will come, Sidney. We'll have courage. When this troublesome cold shall have passed away, you will gain strength. Don't try to talk now."

Just then Maurice came in. He was startled to find Sidney so feeble, but forgetful of the weak nerves of an invalid, or probably with his robustness and vigor not even conscious of them, sat and talked awhile, I trying to save Sidney by answering all his questions myself. My husband called me to him, and whispering, said:

"Ask him to go away. I don't want him here—how could he come? He's so selfish, Mary—so selfish."

I was alarmed, for I thought him wandering, and I stood over him a moment, giving him some drink and arranging some pillows. Maurice had not heard the remark, for he sat at the further end of the room, but he called to me as he went into the hall, and with a look of undisguised alarm, said:

"Sidney is very ill; you must have some one else besides yourself to take care of him."

My heart died within me, but after the remark which my husband had just made, I was sure that I should be his best nurse; and I knew, too, how strongly he disliked to have any one else. Aunt Posey had gone home for the night, there was no one in the house save us three—my husband, my babe, and myself. The little one was in a quiet sleep. I put on a dressing-gown and sat down by Sidney's bed. He was very tired, but looked satisfied and happy to have me with him, and no intruder there. He tried to sleep, but a strange wakefulness had taken possession of him. It was not pain, but weariness, a longing for rest, but unable to find it, a faintness, also, which nothing could allay. I mixed some stimulant and gave him, but its effect lasted only a few minutes. At last he fell into what seemed to be a quiet slumber, and I threw myself upon a couch near, and tried to sleep, for anxiety and watching had made me very weary. But the needed sleep was slow to come at my call, and it was nearly morning when I became unconscious.

From this short rest I was aroused, a little after daylight, by Sidney's voice:

"Mary! Mary! come to me!"

I sprang up hastily, but the instant I raised my head from the pillow all was darkness around me, and I felt as if all in the room was swimming round me. I fell back, but the will with its strong power gave me strength, and holding my head with both hands, I staggered to his bedside.

"I would like a little wine," he said; "I am very faint."

I gave him some wine, but he said:

"It does not revive me as it has done. Give me a little more."

"Shall I make you a cup of strong coffee?" I asked, thinking, as he was very fond of that, it might strengthen him more than the wine. He assented, and in a few minutes I brought it to him; but no, he turned away from it with almost loathing, and then I noticed such a far-off look in his eyes, as if he saw something beyond my vision. There was a smile, too, as he looked at me and made a motion for me to come nearer. I placed my hand under the pillow to raise it, thinking his head was too low; this brought his head nearer and resting upon me.

"Don't move," he whispered, "let me lie so. I am going home—it is not death, but new life!"

Then I knew—why did I not see it before?—that this was death. Aunt Posey came in, and her experienced eye saw it at once. Her care, and that of the doctor, who soon came, prolonged life a little while. Oh, those precious moments.

"Forgive me, Mary," he said, as he looked upon me for the last time, just before the eyes became dim in death. "You will find all my papers in my desk—read, and love me still."

Two days after the funeral, Fanny arrived.

"How kind your father was to let you come," I said; "I can't thank him enough."

"Yes, he was, auntie, and what's more than that, I have been teasing him this morning, and he says I may stay with you till my fall term commences; so I sha'n't leave you for many weeks. You'll let me wait upon you, auntie,

and be the housekeeper? I'm an awkward, ignorant little thing, but I'll do the best I can, and one thing you know, auntie, there's no one in this wide world can feel for you as I do. I know what you have lost. Dear, dear uncle Sidney—we'll talk about him, and tell the baby what he was, and he shall grow up thinking of his own dear father in heaven. I'm going to have my piano brought over here, and will sing his songs, and perhaps, auntie—perhaps—I think—I believe he will be here, too. You think so, don't you, auntie, dear? I should despair, if I didn't think our loved ones revisited this earth and watched over us, and loved and cared for us still."

Dear little ministering angel! She had touched the right chord at last.

That day, as we sat by the fire, Fanny and I made our plans. I would assist her in her studies, and we would read and sing, and work together. Aunt Posey was soon to go on her annual tour to the White Mountains, and we should be left to do our own housekeeping—a plan that seemed to delight Fanny.

"Then surely," I thought, "I must rouse myself, and try to do something for one who seeks my happiness. Yes, I will live for those he loved. I will watch over them as he would wish me to do. I will live for them, and be cheerful that they may not associate gloom with death. They had kindly left me alone. My baby lay in my lap, so glad to get back to his mother's bosom, that like a little nested bird, he curled his head down, and fell asleep. Then I prayed and wrestled with my great sorrow, and, thank God, I prevailed. I was not reconciled to my loss, but I was given faith to believe that he was not lost—that he was with me still."

The change that came over me was marvelous to myself, and my subsequent cheerfulness surprised me more than others, and I have heard that it was even said that "Mrs. Perry didn't feel her loss so deeply as they supposed she would." Even this did not trouble me much, for I had such a sweet abiding presence with me, a feeling of confidence in an unseen but present spirit, that no gossip could disturb me. Once, and once only in my after life, did the supposition that I had forgotten my husband, give me exceeding pain.

But, I am anticipating. Let us return to Fanny. The summer days came on—those long, delicious summer days, when earth is so full of brightness and beauty. Aunt Posey was at the Notch House, and we would often imagine her in all the glory of her power, reigning triumphantly over slaughtered lambs, trussed poultry, roasted, quartered, and hung beef, and glorying in cakes and marmalades, pickles, jellies, pyramids, etc.

"Only give me the materials and liberty to use 'em, and I can make folks wonderfully happy at dinner-time," she often said. Meanwhile, we were living in great simplicity and quiet. Our household labors were light and pleasant, to one, at least. Fanny, released from restraints of school, found much enjoyment in the kitchen, and we had some wonderful culinary experiments. They had all lost their charm for me, now that Sidney's eye was not there to see, or

his smile to approve my success. But Fanny was unwearied in her domestic pursuits. "I should think you intended to marry a poor man," I said, one day, as she was working very busily laying up all the fruit from the garden, that nothing should be wasted.

"And, indade, ma'am, I do," as Pat would say.

"But you'll bring him a fortune, Fanny."

"I'm not so sure of that, auntie," she said, as she sat down under the apple-tree with a basket of apples and a knife, her sleeves rolled up, showing her white, plump arms, and her curls confined by an improvised myrtle wreath, and her cheeks ruddy with exercise.

"She is a little beauty," I said, to myself, as I laid the baby on the grass, and seated myself to help her cut the apples.

"You see, auntie, these are nice apples, and I intend to make a jar of apple and quince sauce for winter use, and then, too, I shall dry some, so that nothing will be lost from our garden. Wouldn't Aunt Hannah laugh to see me now—me! the idle, wasteful, troublesome little miss that used to annoy her so much! By the way, auntie, how wonderfully kind she is to us lately. I wonder if it was her own suggestion, sending those nice chickens yesterday; and then, do you notice how abundantly we are supplied with grapes and pears? She did like Uncle Sidney, and his death has softened her feelings toward us. But why should she dislike Frank? So noble and generous as he is—isn't it too bad?"

"She wishes to please your father, probably, and his prejudices, I think, are strong, though he will not acknowledge them. Are there any circumstances in his family connections that should make him object to your friendship?"

"I am not aware of any, and yet, sometimes, auntie, I think there must be some mystery in the affair. My father has spent much time in Florida; my mother and Frank's were very dear friends, but this fact should only endear him to us. I know those old Spanish families have most bitter feuds, but why should my father join in them? And then, we have known Frank from childhood. Isn't he honorable and true, auntie, if ever boy could be so?"

"You must remember, Fanny, I have only seen him once; but, Sidney loved him as a brother, and therefore I know he *must* be good and honorable."

"Well, auntie, I have thought the matter all over, and have made up my mind once and for ever. I shall never love any one else as I love Frank, and I have none of that exalted, transcendental virtue which leads one to entire self-abnegation. I cannot enter the temple of Vesta, and feed its fires all my life long because my father is arbitrary. No. I shall once more ask his consent to our correspondence; if he refuses, I must disobey; and if Frank gains promotion, if he gets to be passed lieutenant, as I believe he will, we will marry."

"Without a father's blessing?" I asked, looking seriously at Fanny.

"Without *my* father's blessing," she answered, decidedly, while the color deepened a little on her cheek, but she didn't stop paring the apple in her hand till it was finished. Then

laying it down, she said, slowly and distinctly: "I believe that our Great Father in Heaven, who loves all his creatures and delights in their happiness, will bless us. I am afraid you will think me an ungrateful, wicked child, but I will speak out. I can't help it, and it may do me good. You may show me that I am wrong, perhaps; but, auntie—don't be frightened, it will out—I don't love my father! I mean I do not love him as daughters generally love a father—as you love yours—as all children ought to love."

I suppose I must have had a strange, wild look in my eyes as Fanny spoke, for, indeed, I didn't know what to think of such a confession as this.

"I know, auntie," she continued, "that he is what the world calls a gentleman, unusually free from all the vices of the world—that he is courteous in his manners, pleasing in his person, and successful also in his profession. I know that he is liberal to me, though in that matter, as I have property in my own right, I do not suppose he exercises much self-denial on this point. Sometimes I have ventured timidly to inquire about my mother. I was told she was eighteen years old when she was married—that she was called very beautiful—that the northern climate did not agree with her—that her portrait is like her, but not at all flattered. This is all that I could learn—not a word about *my* mother—only a brief description of the casket which held the jewel. I am not certain but I could love my father if he would only show some emotion, some real deep feeling when talking of my mother. Oh, auntie, tell me, please, am I wicked, am I an unnatural child, because I have no affection—nothing but cold respect for my father?"

I was so astonished that for a moment I could not answer her.

"Indeed, my dear child, I don't know what to say—it is so strange. I can't understand it. I fear, my dear child, that you are to blame, for who could be more considerate, more kindly thoughtful, than your father has been to me? I can trust him implicitly."

Fanny made no reply, but sat rather abstractedly, paring her apple. I did not like the conversation to end thus, and because I could think of nothing else to say, I added:

"Perhaps, Fanny, your father will relent when he sees Frank's devotion to his profession, and his constancy to you."

I saw one tear trickle slowly down Fanny's cheek, but she brushed it away.

"You don't know my father, auntie. I had hoped that you would understand me; but, let it all pass. Only one thing, auntie; you must promise you will never forsake me, nor deny me a home, wherever you are—never, never—will you?"

She threw her arms round my neck and sobbed for a moment.

"Never, never, my dear child. You are mine, my own sister now, and as long as I live you shall always find a home in my heart, a dwelling wherever I am."

"That is all, auntie, that is enough. I shall go back to school and finish the year, and then

patiently await events. Oh, this terrible war—when will it end?”

“It is most time to hear again from Frank. I have a great curiosity, Fanny, to hear more about that Indian princess.”

“Do you know, auntie, that I have a fancy that she is strangely mixed up with our families, and that all our early history is known to her?”

“She is an enigma to me, Fanny, and I hope some day to understand it. But how can Frank, a young and innocent boy, have made so bitter an enemy, and pray who can this enemy be?”

“We shall know some day, auntie, if Frank ever returns, and my faith is strong that he will.”

That evening brother Maurice came to tea, and he was so sociable and easy, so entertaining and gentlemanly, that I looked at the daughter—so beautiful and winning—and wondered why this want of affection between them. I noticed, what had escaped my observation before, that Fanny seldom addressed her father. She answered him respectfully, almost timidly, when he spoke, but never commenced conversation, and, while he was the gentleman, in his manner, that manner had no warmth or impressment about it. He was very kind to bring papers and books, and always sent us fruit and flowers in their season.

“This evening,” he said, “we must enter upon a little business. You know,” he added, turning to me, “that your husband’s affairs must now be settled, and lest you should have any anxiety upon the subject, let me assure you that I will arrange it all; leave every thing in my hands, and know that a brother’s care and vigilance will be exercised for you.”

I thanked him from the depth of my heart, nor could I express how much relief this gave me. I had known that I must nerve myself to such a task, but had recoiled from it, as every woman must do who knows little of business forms, and sickens at the thought of performing its details.

“You may, if you please,” Maurice added, “hand me his papers for examination as soon as convenient.”

“Oh, yes,” I said; “he keeps them all—his business papers, I mean—in a little trunk which is in the secretary. I will go and fetch it now.”

I went into the nursery, where the secretary had been placed during my husband’s illness, and which had I not opened since his death. A faintness came over me as I turned the key which his hand had used last, and I trembled so that I could scarcely stand when I raised the inner desk cover, beneath which lay all his papers, just as he had left them.

I should have lingered long here, but seeing the little trunk on one side, I remembered my errand. A note lay upon it, directed to myself.

How eagerly yet fearfully I broke the seal, and read:

“MY DEAR MARY—It is my wish that you examine all my private papers before allowing any one else to do so, and be not surprised if I ask you to keep them from my brother Maurice. I have made a will as you will learn after looking at the contents of this trunk. I have also, during my illness, written for your perusal, some little incidents in my own life, which may, I hope, banish from your heart all doubt

of my love. I have watched you, dearest, in some of those hours when you were troubled about what seemed to you mysterious little matters—but through them all, I knew there was, deep down in your heart, a strong, loving faith in your husband. Believe me, I shall die, loving you with my whole soul, and assured that I have your love in return. It has been with much pain that I have written the paper labeled, ‘For Mary,’ and you will excuse the apparent carelessness. I would have copied it but I was too weary. I have prayed for a forgiving spirit, to die in peace and love with every one, but there are some things hard to bear, and almost impossible to forget. God bless you, darling, and teach my boy to love his father who longs so earnestly to live for his sake. I can write no more on earth, I will wait for you in heaven.

“Yours in death, SIDNEY.”

I am sure I read that through, for I remembered the words, “Yours in death, Sidney,” for they seemed to be stamped on my memory, and I remember too, hearing a man’s step in the next room, and knew that it was Maurice, waiting for me. A sort of vague dread of him took possession of me, and that is all I do remember; there is a long blank, for the next I knew, Fanny was bending over me as I lay upon the bed, and bathing my head with cologne.

“Are you better now?” she asked.

“Yes, yes, I am well,” I said. “What has happened?”

“Why, auntie, you fell upon the floor in a fainting fit, and lucky for you that I came in as I did. I was going to take the baby out for a ride in his little carriage, and came in for his hat, just as you fell. The desk was open, and I locked it, and there was a paper in your hand. See, here it is on the bed. Father came in and raised you up and laid you on the bed, and said, you must keep still for some days. He said you need not think of any business for some time yet. He was very sorry he had mentioned the matter to you. If he could procure the trunk you mentioned, you need have no anxiety.”

“Where is the key to my desk?” I asked, hurriedly.

“Here it is,” she replied, handing it to me.

“Now please hand me that hair chain in the bureau-drawer.”

She did so, and I tried to fasten the key to it, but my hands trembled so that I could not, and Fanny did it for me.

“Now put it round my neck, my dear child.”

She complied; then reaching for the letter, I folded it, after two or three efforts, and laid it in my bosom.

“I am so tired, Fanny, may I sleep a little?”

This was the beginning of a nervous fever; and when I came out of it, the summer was far advanced. My illness had prevented Maurice from making any further reference to business.

It was near the close of summer; Fanny had been at the Stone House examining her wardrobe, for the purpose of bringing over such as she needed for colder weather. I sat in the dark, with my head bowed over the baby’s crib, and wishing I could sleep my last, long sleep with him at my side, when the door opened, and Fanny came in.

“Auntie, are you here—here in the dark?”

"Yes, love, come to me."

She came and sat down on the carpet at my feet, and laying her head in my lap, burst into tears.

"What is it, Fanny? Are you, too, sad to-night?"

"Yes, auntie. Why, do you know it? Has father told you?"

"Told me what? No trouble, I hope?"

"Have you forgotten that I was to go to school this fall, and not return for one year?"

"Oh, Fanny!" I exclaimed, "it must not be; how can I give you up? I had hoped your father was forgetful!"

"Not he, and he is vigilant too; only think! he asked me if I had heard from Frank—(I guess Aunt Hannah put the idea into his head)—well, I never told a lie in my life, and I answered frankly, 'Yes.' He asked to see it, and I took it from my pocket at once, for I thought perhaps it would soften him, and seeing how Frank was promoted, he might consent to our correspondence. But I can't tell you, auntie, how angry my father looked as he read, and when he had finished it, he put it into the fire—you know he has a little fire evenings in his room. I was so angry that I could not control my feelings, and forgot he was my father. I tried to snatch the letter from the coals, but he was too quick for me, and pushed it in with the tongs, till it was one thin, black mass.

"Oh, you wicked, cruel man!" I exclaimed, "I never will love you more, and if you think to make me obedient in this way, you are much mistaken. I love Frank all the more for your persecution."

"Now, auntie, don't speak yet; I know what you will say, and if you are hard upon me now, it will just break my heart—let me tell you more. I was frightened myself at my own audacity, and expected father would drive me out of the house. But I might have known better—that is not his way. He smiled—oh, auntie! those smiles of his are worse than any threats. I grew more angry, and was flinging myself out of the room, when he bade me stop. His voice was low and calm, and I dared not disobey.

"It is not lady-like to behave in that way; sit down till you are more calm. I should be sorry to have you go to your aunt Mary in that state of mind; her attachment to you would lessen considerably." (Oh, aunt Mary, just as if one look at your dear, sweet face wouldn't calm me at once!)

"I don't think aunt Mary would ever treat me so badly," I muttered.

"I am sure of one thing," he said, "she will not uphold you in disobedience to your father."

And thus we conversed over the matter, there in the darkness. We did not want the light—it would have pained us both immeasurably—so sacred was our sorrow. At length, when the storm of our grief was over, and a few moments of calmness had given us more peace of mind, she departed, imprinting a long kiss upon my lips. I remained amid the heavy shadows of the nursery, bending my head again over the crib, with still deeper shadows on my heart. It was hard to part with Fanny; she had been the light of my home; but I was selfish; it was right that she should be at school, and her father con-

sulted only her best good. I must uphold him. I was more convinced of this next day when he came in and consulted with me about her studies, and said he was only seeking her best happiness.

In a few days she went away, and then I began to think of my husband's papers. Even then I should hardly have felt like going to them, but the carpenter who built our house came to me for some specifications which he wished in his business, and I had promised to copy for him. He reminded me of this promise, and having a leisure hour one rainy day, I went to my husband's desk—the desk which I had not opened since the day I felt ill. Maurice had advised me not to do so, as he had arranged my business, so that it would not be necessary for me to trouble myself about it. I had often thought of the paper labeled—"For my wife," but as it was laid with notes and receipts, I supposed it only a business document, and while I read and re-read every note, letter, or extract in his handwriting, I avoided that package of papers. He had written a great deal—notes on his historical readings, on a course of chemical lectures—valuable extracts on gardening, etc., etc. These had afforded me much amusement and I was very glad to let these papers remain unread.

But now as I opened the desk, I was startled to find that paper missing. I was sure that I had never disturbed it since the day when, with great effort (for I was very weak then), I had replaced it where it first attracted my notice. I wished to be sure, however, that I had returned it, and took every article carefully from the desk, but the paper was not there—some other hand than mine had removed it. The key had never left me. The hair chain to which it was attached, I wore constantly, excepting nights, when I laid it in the little box with my watch. Whoever used it must have had access to my sleeping-room.

CHAPTER VII.

ACCIDENTAL REVELATIONS.

AFTER Fanny's departure, I had taken for companion and assistant, a young girl, about fifteen years of age. At first I suspected *her* of the theft. She must have known where I kept that key, and yet what should such a child as that wish with my private papers? There was a box near them with a few rare old coins, but every one was in its place; there was also a box of jewels, some rings, and two or three antique breast-pins, which must surely have had more charms for a young girl than old papers. No, no, it could not be Emma. I looked over the files of bills, old notes, etc., lest this should by some mistake have been slipped in with them—but it was not there. In one package, I fancied a part had been removed, for the band was loose, and on refiling them I noticed that they were numbered from one to twenty, and that numbers nine and ten were missing; but whether they had been removed since my husband's death, I had no means of ascertaining. But I was becoming very suspicious and uncomfortable, and I closed the desk to sit down and think.

The next week Aunt Posey came from her mountain trip, looking fat and happy. She and

her husband were now able to make their last payment on the farm, and—"next time I'm going for the pleasure of it," she said.

She had walked from her home in the evening to see me, and I proposed that she should remain all night, to which she consented. The judge came in and sat an hour—an hour I will never forget. He was kind as usual, but there was more tenderness of manner that was none the less respectful, but his low tones and delicate compliments gave me a new and strange pleasure. I promised the truth, reader, and give it you. I thought just then that no man living was more noble and good than Judge Perry. I forgot (God forgive me!) my own husband in heaven, and my child on earth, as I listened to his honeyed words. When he rose to go, he took my hand; he retained it; I felt the blood crimsoning cheek and brow, and I knew, before he spoke—for woman's comprehension at such times is quicker than man's speech—I knew, and my heart was ready to yield allegiance to this man, when he should ask for it. It was no goodness of mine, no clear perception of right and wrong that held me back. I acted, as philosophers say we never do act, in direct opposition to my own will, for when the judge, bending low, said:

"Sister Mary, it is useless for me to struggle in silence longer with my feelings—I thought I loved you only as a sister; but a deeper, stronger feeling has taken possession of my whole soul. May I hope that you will, before long, permit me to call you by the more endearing name of wife?"

I trembled exceedingly; he perceived my emotion, and threw one arm gently around me. Can you believe me, reader, when I say that my heart responded "Yes,"—that I longed just then, (and what true woman does not!) for the constant support of that strong arm, and the light of that intellect to guide me! I would have said, "Yes," with the lips, as the heart dictated, but a stronger power than my will—a force that resisted the magnetic charm of that man who could so easily win woman—a master that I knew not, but whom I obeyed instinctively, or rather that did, without my assent, use my organs of speech, and to my great surprise, spoke thus:

"No, brother Maurice, this must not be; let us remain as we are. I cannot so soon forget my husband. I feel that he claims me yet, and is waiting in heaven for me."

I became, as I spoke, very cold. I shuddered, as if out in the open air, rather than by the warm fireside; why, I knew not, unless caused by the strange change that came over Maurice; his usual bland expression passed away; and I saw, or thought I saw, the face of a demon glaring at me. It was the delusion of the moment, for the next instant he had turned his face a little one side, and remarked, kindly:

"I am not without hope; at least you did not reject me utterly. Good-night; I start for Boston this evening. Look upon me still as your brother, and let me have a care for your happiness. Good-night."

He was gone, and I stood there in the dim fire-light, leaning my head against the mantle, and weeping bitter tears. What did make me

say that? I who am left now so desolate and lone. What invisible power has such control over me? Some spirit of evil has taken possession of me, and I am forced to yield. Hannah Price, I fancied, had the power attributed to the witches of ancient date, and had willed me to act thus. I was out of harmony with myself and all the world. Aunt Posey came in as I stood there; the good creature always assumed a sort of care of every thing as soon as she entered the house. My only wonder used to be when she was there, how we ever lived without her.

"There, honey, the house is all safe and I've taken away the candle from your girl, Emma. Do you let her read by candlelight after she is in bed? It is a bad plan for girls' eyes, and dangerous for the house. There she was, in bed, poring over some old papers.

"Why, no, Auntie, I supposed the child had more sense than to do that."

"If she hasn't, we must put it into her; now let me see to you. Why, how you tremble! What is the matter? Are you going to have a swamp chill, as we say in Florida?"

She ran and prepared some warm drink, and while doing so her wits, which were always busy enough, worked as fast as her hands. When she came back she bade me get into bed, and she would give me the hot drink then, and rub my hands and feet. A shrewd smile came over her face as she looked at me:

"Never mind; don't worry about what you can't help. I believe you allers mean right, and so be easy; you hain't done nothing wrong, I'm sure."

The comfort was rather sibylline, and might have been given without any knowledge of what had taken place; but she couldn't have said any thing better. Whether it was her medicine, or her soothing words, or something above and beyond these, I know not, but a sweet quiet stole over my spirit and senses and I was soon wrapped in sleep—a sleep from which I was suddenly roused at midnight by the cry of "fire!" which rung out clear and loud from the street. I sprung up and looked out of the window, and saw the west room of the Stone House apparently one sheet of flame. I ran to Aunt Posey's room—she was not there, nor could I find Emma. I hurried back to my room where little Sidney was sleeping with the intention of dressing myself as soon as possible, and going to see what I could do to aid, but the next minute I discovered by the light of the burning room, Aunt Posey, Aunt Hannah and Emma bringing things out, and men busily bringing water to quench the flames.

The house was of stone, with a slate roof; but the furniture and the curtain draperies seemed to be all on fire. I ran out, but met Aunt Posey with her arms full of books, coming to the old house which stood between the burning building and my own home.

"Run back," she said; "don't leave the child alone. The fire is nearly out, and if it hadn't been for the screams of that crazy fellow you wouldn't have been wakened at all. Stop a moment; you may, if you please, get the key of the house, and I'll leave these things on the steps and go back for more."

I ran for the key and was busy taking in the books when she returned again, and Emma with her, the latter carrying a heavy writing-desk, which she let fall as she entered. The jar caused it to break open and scattered the papers upon the floor.

"Never mind, never mind," said Aunt Posey; "we can lock every thing up till to-morrow. Come on, now, and see if we can save the carpet."

But the heat in the room and the water which the men kept pouring in, prevented them from saving any thing save a part of the books, a writing-desk, the lighter furniture and one or two choice pictures.

It seems that Aunt Posey after her kind attentions to me, went into the kitchen, and instead of going to bed took a notion to mix up some cakes for breakfast. It was a new receipt, which she had learned at the Mountain House, and thought to give me a pleasant surprise in the morning. Then it occurred to her that some fresh apple-sauce would be an addition to them, and she descended to the cellar for some, and, to use her own words: "she found so many speckled ones she jest thought she'd stop and sort out one barrel of 'em, for she hated to see 'em going so." This kept her some time, and when she came back to the kitchen and sat down by the window to pare the apples, she saw a bright light reflected all over the room, and the snow without seemed all aglow.

"I first thought the day of the Lord had come, and Posey had lived to see it! But, dear me, I was paring apples, and hadn't on even a clean apron! I dropped the apples, and was running out to meet the Lord, as he descended from the clouds, when I saw it wasn't that glory at all, but jest the west room all afire. I ran as quick as my feet would carry me, and roused Aunt Hannah: but it seemed as if I never could make her hear, nor Jim neither, and there was the room afire, and I couldn't get in! But, thank heaven, I roused 'em at last, and we three, with Emma's help, would have put it all out, and made no disturbance, if that crazy man, as he seemed to me, hadn't come along screaming, 'Fire! Fire!'"

It seems that the Judge had been examining some papers in an old desk, which he had preserved with great care because it had belonged to his father. He had a candle in his hand; the desk lid was thrown back, and not having any place convenient he thoughtlessly placed the candle in the desk, and forgetting to remove it, had locked it in with the other contents.

He did this, it seems, after leaving our house, and a few minutes before taking the stage for Boston. He had rode some fifteen miles when his carelessness occurred to him, and he hired a man to come in haste to give Aunt Hannah warning. But Aunt Posey had seen it before, and succeeded in so far quenching the flames that no part of the house was injured save the west room.

"Ain't I glad them apples of yours needed looking after, Miss Mary?"

She had got into the habit of calling me by that name, as she used to say "Miss Flora."

Aunt Hannah expressed great gratitude for

what she termed the wonderful preservation of her life; but she was constantly saying, "How strange that the Judge should be so careless! She never knew him to be so before." And this she reiterated again and again. But this event was perhaps of more consequence to myself than any of the other spectators of the tragedy.

Toward noon the next day I went over to the old house to see the condition of the articles which had been moved there for safety. There was a pell-mell mass of books and papers, pictures, maps, account books, etc., such as would naturally accumulate in a gentleman's study; among other things the broken writing desk, just as it had fallen, with the lock burst and the papers scattered near it.

Imagine my surprise when among them I saw my long-lost paper!

I will give the reader, without note or comment, the contents of the precious document which absorbed my attention that night.

"MY DEAR WIFE—Excuse the narrative form of this paper—it is less painful for me to write thus:

"Many years ago my brother, Maurice Perry, was sent to Florida by the Government, on some business connected with the public lands in that territory. He there became acquainted with two families of Spanish origin, (though one had intermarried with an English family) by the name of Dupont and Ashley. They dwelt near the St. John's not far from St. Augustine, but joining the lands of old King Philip, with whom they lived on the most friendly terms. My brother was domesticated with the Duponts, who had two most lovely daughters. I need not describe them when I tell you that one was Aunt Posey's 'Miss Flora,' our Fanny's mother, and the other her sister, of whom you have never heard me speak, nor do I think I could command myself sufficiently now to utter her name. I have resolved and re-resolved to do so many times since my marriage. Once, when you asked me abruptly if I had ever loved before my marriage, I longed to confess that passage of my life's history, on which the name of Agnes Dupont is indelibly engraved. I told you then, what I fully believed to be the truth, that no one living had heard any protestations of love from me. Not long after, I learned that at the time I spoke, Agnes was alive, but alas, so near death and so full of sorrow, that you, Mary, my own wife, would have been the first to have forgotten the past, and wept to see the wreck of one so young and lovely. But I am anticipating my narrative.

"The two families to which I have referred, though bound by no ties of kindred, were very dear to each other. Flora, Marguerite and Agnes were like sisters, and seldom separated. Maurice Perry could not fail to become interested in one so lovely as Flora. You know my brother. Nature gave him an agreeable person, a musical voice, while travel, and intercourse with polished society, had given what the world calls a pleasing address. As for the rest, what he is in his true character you must judge. I have spoken of King Philip. He had children; one son, named Coacooche, or 'Wildcat,' and Nehah, said to have been in her youth the beauty of her tribe. Nehah was much beloved by the two families, but my mother was employed in a suit to recover some slaves said to have run away from Georgia, and taken refuge with King Philip. They were in reality the descendants of these runaways, and having never lived with their Georgia claimants, were unwilling to be retaken, and resisted the claim. The chief had also signed away a portion of his land, when intoxicated, and was very angry when obliged to part with his ancestral possessions for a load of trash. My brother was shrewd; he could manage such cases, and either by the merits of the case, or by chicanery, gained his cause. Philip was much

irritated, and I suppose this loss has made him more revengeful and bitter toward the whites.

"Aunt Posey and Jim are among the slaves that were formerly on his land, but were purchased from him by Mr. Dupont, and followed my brother's wife to New England. 'Miss Flora,' as Aunt Posey still calls her, was like a rare hot-house plant, transported from the conservatory to a colder climate. She did not live many years, and perhaps did not find in her husband the domestic qualities which are necessary to make home happy as the fascinations which charm the girl. However, on this point I will be silent. She died when Fanny was a mere child. She faded gradually, like a summer flower in early Autumn. When she first perceived symptoms of consumption she wished that her sister might be sent for at once.

"I shall never forget my first sight of Agnes Dupont. She was standing in Sunset Porch one summer evening, draped in some of those soft, light tissues that make a fair woman look almost ethereal—but I can not, no, I can not describe her—let it pass; the vision remains with me as one of those beautiful pictures, few and far between, which sometimes make human life radiant.

'She was a vision of delight,
When first she burst upon my sight.'

"I can not tell you when I began to love her—it seems to me that from the moment I saw her that evening, my soul's allegiance began. We were thrown much together, and while my brother looked on with apparent indifference, Flora seemed desirous to encourage our attachment. However, as she grew feeble, every other feeling was absorbed in our anxiety for her; but when she was laid in the grave, our mutual love was strengthened by companionship in sorrow. Maurice was at that time engaged in a political contest, and diverted, perhaps, from his grief.

"A few months after Flora's death, Agnes returned to Florida with her father, who came on for her. We were betrothed, and in one year we were to have been married. I worked hard that year, determined to earn the means to place my wife above the drudgery of household toil. I suppose I worked too hard, for my health failed, and after a long and hurried business journey in the month of August, I was taken with typhoid fever, and was dangerously ill. My life was considered doubtful, and a letter was written to my brother Maurice, urging his return—he had gone to Washington—immediately. This letter was not received for many weeks—it was forwarded to Florida, whither he had again gone.

"Now, my wife, comes the part of my story which is hardest to relate. There were three months that I could not write a line to Agnes, but as soon as I could hold a pen, I wrote her a long letter. No answer. I wrote again—it missed the destination, as I supposed at the time, from the inefficiency and irregularity of the mails. Maurice never wrote to me except on business; but we heard, indirectly, that he had decided to settle in Florida, where he was buying large tracts of land. He was absent a year, and, as our business compelled it, I was obliged to remain at home—you can imagine in what anxiety. Once he wrote to me, stating that Agnes had gone to Europe—that accounted for her silence, and I returned to my business with fresh zeal.

"But, there was something strange in my brother's appearance when he returned. He had always treated me with more reserve than is usually maintained between brothers—but this reserve was now exchanged for a manner as strange as inexplicable to me. Sometimes he was very familiar and strove to gain my confidence; again, moody, and unbearably haughty. He had no information to give me of Agnes, save her going to Europe, as he said; that he had left there twelve months before, and had been in other parts of the country, until just before Agnes's departure.

"I waited months longer. In those days commu-

nication between Europe and this country was not as rapid as now, and I was patient.

"Wearied at last with hope deferred, and having some undefined suspicion that all was not right, I started for Florida, without making my intentions known to any one. It was a long, wearisome journey. Imagine my feelings when I came to Wahallo, to find neither the Duponts nor Ashleys there. Their houses were deserted, and the plantation occupied by a few negroes.

"King Philip and most of his tribe were in a distant part of Florida, full of vengeance against the whites. No one could give me any information concerning them, save that both families had gone to Europe to remain until the Indian troubles were settled.

"I returned home in a state bordering on despair, only to find the following note in the Burnside post-office directed to me:

"DEAR SIR—I have heard that you are not dead, as reported in Florida more than a year since. I do not communicate this information to Miss Agnes, as she was married to your brother last week. She leaves home with her father, for Europe, in a few days, where it is understood that her husband will meet her, as soon as he has transacted his business in Washington.

"I am a stranger to you, but Agnes is a dear sister to me. We were raised together; and I owe my education to her. She loves our race. I shall never forsake her—but she has been most cruelly deceived, I think. Your brother is an enemy to us—he has taken away the lands of my father, and now there is nothing left but to fight the white man till his bones whiten the land.

"Marguerite, my sister, loves Agnes. It is she that told me to let you know your brother's perfidy. She weeps for Agnes, and Coacooche, the great warrior, my brother, says the 'pale-face talker' has bewitched Agnes, and that the evil spirit is in him. She wept many days for you, till we thought she would fade away like the flowers, but your brother was a medicine, and has had power over her. Marguerite says she believed you were not dead. She has gone herself with them, but she will never return. The Great Spirit wants her in heaven.

"Yours respectfully, NEHAH."

"You can not imagine my grief and consternation nor understand my feelings toward my perfidious brother. I carried the letter to him, but I spoke not. He read it through: not a muscle of his face changed—he wore the same imperturbable, placid expression.

"Well," he said, returning it to me, "didn't I receive a letter stating that there were no hopes of your recovery? And that letter being delayed for months prevented my returning home to see you. I supposed you were not living. Can you blame me for wishing to secure a wife like Agnes? Can you blame her for receiving all the consolation which I could give?"

"The cold heartlessness of this speech struck me dumb. I could only articulate:

"Then you are married?"

"I don't deny it," he said, and I left his presence, feeling, my dearest wife, that there was no constancy in woman. Pardon the feeling; I believe I am too sincere, too truly a man, to allow such thoughts long.

"Aunt Posey, to whom Agnes was very dear, though Flora was her foster-child, and more beloved, was very much troubled that we could hear no news from Florida. I told Aunt Posey, and never did I have purer sympathy in trouble. She knew Maurice. Her keen sense had, even before Mrs. Perry's death, read the hollowness of his heart.

"I can not tell you how I lived for two or three years. Thanks to you, dear Mary, I was consoled, and learned woman's true worth. Agnes was never mentioned in our family. We learned, through Frank Ashley, that the families had returned to Florida. Maurice was gone for some months—we

supposed to bring his wife home, but she never came, and the report reached us that she was dead—that she and the devoted Marguerite died of fever in Europe. We had reason to suppose this, as she did not come to Burnside.

"I have erred in not telling you of this, but it was so painful to me to speak of it, and as I could not tell you without accusing my brother of treachery which I feel belongs to him, I deferred my sad recital, till a promise, exacted under the most trying circumstances, placed it out of my power.

"One evening, as I was leaving the counting-room to go home, weary with the daily treadmill of business life, I met at the door the strange woman whose appearance had some time before excited you. When she heard you called Mrs. Perry, I think she must have supposed that you were knowing to these facts. When she saw me she drew me one side and said: 'Read this,' handing me a note.

"MY DEAR SIDNEY—I have been terribly, cruelly deceived. God knows my heart. I have loved none but you. Your brother told me you were dead. He destroyed your letters; and when I mourned for you, he talked constantly of you and your goodness. He was artful, insinuating. I was bewildered, fascinated, as the snake charms its victim. Marguerite warned me; Nehah knelt and prayed that I would send him away. But he won me, I can't tell you how. I thought all the time that he was like you—that we would dwell together upon your memory. And he said (oh, false man that he was!) that he loved me the better for my attachment to you.

"I learned, when too late, that you were living, that you had written again and again. I can't explain how I knew it; some time, perhaps, Nehah will tell you all. She would have bitter revenge. But now, when I am dying, I would say the Lord's Prayer as I said it at my mother's knee, and forgive as I hope to be forgiven. The physician tells me that I cannot live many weeks, and I am coming home to tell your brother that I am his wife only in name—that I die faithful to you. I must see you before I die, and I would lie near my sister when I am dead. I write this for you lest I should not live to reach Burnside. Nehah has promised to go with me. I wrote to her long since, knowing that she went North to visit Aunt Posey. A kind Providence ordered that the letter should reach her after much delay.

"I write you as from the grave. If I had ten years of life I would enter a convent, and spend them in penitence. But thank God, he has been merciful, and granted the richest boon I can ask—a speedy death. Farewell—God bless you, and forgive your brother the great wrong he has practiced upon me.

"Yours in life and death, AGNES."

"I had returned to the counting-room, and stood reading by the high desk. Nehah had seated herself on a low stool near the fire, with her back to me. I folded the letter mechanically, and remained standing with my head bowed in my hands, affected, I will honestly say, more by the treachery of a brother than the loss of Agnes. In that hour, dear Mary, you were dearer to me than ever. I felt sure that no sophistry or fascination of Maurice Perry could win your love from me. This was my consolation in that hour. As I stood thus, in deep thought, Nehah came toward me and laid her hand on my arm.

"She is here; come and see her. You will never see her more—she is dressed for the grave. Come with me."

"I followed her mechanically, and found Agnes in her coffin. My first impulse was to send for Maurice, to see the wreck his hands had made. But no; Nehah said he should never look upon her again. Mr. Harmon was sent for; we buried her by night. I know not why I consented to this, but I believe Nehah controlled it all with her strong will and firmness. Oh, Mary, why didn't I tell you all then? I am too weak now to talk, but I leave this as my confession of the only secret which I have kept

from you. You will, I know, forgive me this; your love is all-enduring, all-sacrificing, and will continue beyond this life. My last prayer is, to be permitted to watch and guard you from my home above.

"I am weary, and can write no more, but must subscribe myself, for the last time on earth,

"Your husband, SIDNEY PERRY."

I sat alone at midnight with this paper in my hand, reading and re-reading it till the words seemed burned into my soul. Then came the bitter recollection of my light, careless, and oftentimes reproachful words—words that must have stung his soul to the quick. The hot tears fell upon the paper. And I, too, had fallen under the power of the tempter—had been weighed and found wanting. My feelings toward Maurice Perry were those of indignation and contempt. The mask had fallen, and I saw the demon face as it had once been revealed to me, but then, alas! was willfully blind and would not see.

CHAPTER VIII.

COACOOCHÉ.

SOME two or three days passed before the judge's return. In the mean time, I had various projects as to how I should demean myself toward him.

My impatience was somewhat allayed by the reception of a letter from Fanny, containing a copy of Frank's last, from which I will make some extracts:

"You remember that I wrote you about Coacooche, or 'Wildcat.' The brave chieftain has at last been captured. He was seized on the 21st of May by Major Childs, and sent out of the country to New Orleans, *en route* for Arkansas, where Government had made arrangements to send all the Seminoles as soon as they were captured or could be induced to emigrate.

"General Worth, however, thought best to counteract these orders, and have Coacooche returned to Florida, that he might be used in inducing the remainder of his tribe to go with him. An agent was immediately dispatched to New Orleans to intercept the party and send them back to Tampa Bay. A large force was then sent through the country to Tampa Bay, to be there when the vessel containing Coacooche should arrive. This force was to scour the country, plunder the strongholds of the enemy, and destroy everything that should give sustenance or strength to them. I was one of this party.

"We arrived at Tampa Bay on the third of July. Our general had an interview with Coacooche the next day. It was one of the saddest sights I ever beheld. There was the bold, dashing young chief, whose step had been so free on his native land, now surrounded by fifteen of his chosen warriors, all chained. The degradation of shackles is never effaced from an Indian's mind. As they came slowly up to the quarter-deck to meet General Worth and arrange themselves according to rank, their feet-irons hardly enabled them to step four inches. As they laid their manacled hands upon their knees before them, in the presence of so many who had hitherto hunted them as foes, they hung their heads in silence. The chief sat quietly awaiting his doom.

"I saw in a distant part of the vessel an In-

dian woman, and recognized Nehah, but I must say I hung my head in shame as I stood there by the side of the general as one of his staff, in the position of victor. Once I caught her eye; the expression of her look was reproach, which went to my heart, but when she turned from me to the general, and from him to the other whites on the transport, the expression of intense hatred in her face was terrible. I felt that no white man was safe while she was free.

"General Worth rose and took Coacooche (Wildcat) by the hand. 'You are a great warrior,' said he, 'the Indians throughout the country look to you as their leader, by your counsels they have been governed. The war has lasted for years; much blood has been shed; you have made your hands and the ground red with the blood of women and children. The war must now end. You are the man to do it, and must and will accomplish it. I wish you to state how many days it will require to effect an interview with the Indians in the woods. You can select three or five of these men to carry your talk. Name the time, it shall be granted; but I tell you, as I wish your relatives and friends to be told, that unless they fulfill your demands, yourself and your warriors, now seated here, shall be hung to the yards of this vessel, when the sun sets on the day appointed, with the irons upon your hands and feet. I tell you this that we may well understand each other. I do not wish to frighten you, you are too brave a man for that; but I say what I mean, and I will do it. It is for the benefit of the white and red man. This war must end, and you must end it.'

"Silence pervaded the company as the speaker closed. The harsh grating of the handcuffs broke the spell as each warrior raised his hand to wipe away the tear which never before stole down his rugged cheek. Coacooche rose, his manly form quivering with excitement.

"'I was once a boy. Then I saw the white man afar off. I hunted in these woods with a bow and arrow, then with a rifle. I saw the white man, and was told he was my enemy. I could not shoot him as I would a wolf or bear. Yet like these he came upon me; horses, cattle and fields he took from me. He said he was my friend; he abused our women and children, and told us to go from the land. Still he gave me his hand in friendship; we took it; while taking it he had a snake in the other; his tongue was forked; he lied and stung us. I asked but for a small piece of these lands—enough to plant and live upon—far south, a spot where I could place the ashes of my kindred—a spot only sufficient where I could lay my wife and child. This was not granted to me. I was put in prison; I escaped; I have again been taken; you have brought me back; I am here; I feel the iron in my heart. I have listened to your talk. You and your officers have taken us by the hand in friendship. I can now see my warriors, my women and children; the Great Spirit thanks you; the heart of the poor Indian thanks you. We know but little; we have no books which tell all things; but we have the Great Spirit, moon and stars. These told me last night you would be our friend. I give you my word—it is the word of a chief, a warrior, a brave—it is the word of Coacooche. You say I must end

the war. Look at these irons! Can I go to my warriors? Coacooche chained! No, do not ask me to see them. If I can go to them unchained they will follow me, but I fear they will not obey me when I talk to them in irons. They will say my heart is weak, I am afraid. Could I go free, they will surrender and emigrate.'

"He was told that he could not be freed until his hand had surrendered; that he might select three or five of the prisoners and send them out, and that thirty, forty or fifty days if necessary, should be given for them to come to Tampa Bay, but if they failed to come in, 'the setting sun of that last day,' said the officer, 'shall shine upon the bodies of each one of you hanging in the wind.'

"I cannot describe my feelings to you, dear Fanny, at this moment. The vessel was moored in deep water, two miles from shore. The prisoners were all ironed, and surrounded day and night by sentinels. While Coacooche was speaking, the hour of noon came, and a Government schooner, which was moored near, immediately opened its batteries. As peal after peal struck upon the ear, the chief paused. 'What is this for?' No answer. How could a white man there say in his presence, 'We celebrate our nation's freedom on the land which we have won from the Indian?'

"Coacooche then selected five to go into the interior and collect his band, and thus he spoke to them:

"'The sun shines bright to-day. The day is clear, so let your hearts be. The Great Spirit will guide you. At night, when you camp, take these pipes and tobacco, build a fire; when the moon is up and bright, dance around it, then let the fire go out, and just before the break of day, when the deer sleeps and the moon whispers to the dead, you will hear the voices of those who have gone to the Great Spirit. They will make you strong to carry my talk. My feet are chained, but my head and heart reaches you. The great white chief has given you forty days to come in, and when that time comes I shall walk the land free. Take these sticks—here are thirty-nine—one for each day; this, much larger than the rest, with blood upon it, is the fortieth. When the others are thrown away, and this only remains, say to my people that when the setting sun comes, their chief hangs like a dog, with none but white men to hear his last words. Come, then, come by the stars, as I have led you to battle. Come, for the voice of your chief speaks to you. Say this to my wife and child.' Here he faltered, and turned away to hide the tears which were falling profusely down from his youthful and manly face.

"Without a word being spoken the irons were taken off the five messengers, and they prepared to proceed to the shore. The chief shook each one by the hand, and to the last gave a silk handkerchief and breastpin, saying, 'Give these to my wife and child.'

"The last one had gone. Night had come. I stood leaning against a coil of rope. The moon threw a gloomy shadow over the prison-ship as the dark, naked forms of the prisoners appeared, one by one, on the deck of the vessel. I observed Nehah come slowly toward Coacooche and seat herself by his side.

"Why did you not send me, my brother?"

"I never counsel with women, nor send my words by women; what I say are the words of a man, but when put into the tongue of a woman it is woman's talk."

"It was evident that he mistrusted her a little; her desire for revenge was so strong, and her hatred of her oppressors so deeply rooted that she would be unscrupulous in effecting it. She did not speak to me, yet her look was not fierce and angry, but rather, as I have said, sad and reproachful. I drew near to them."

"Nehah," I said, "I was not among those who betrayed your brother into captivity."

"I know it," said she; "you would not do so. I have trusted you, and the Great Spirit has told me that I could do so."

Coacooche looked at me closely, as if studying my features, and then some conversation passed between them in their own tongue. Then the chief said:

"I know you now. None of your family would betray one of our tribe. Your mother is very dear to us. We called her the 'Pond Lily.' I have seen her since she went to the spirit-land."

"I looked up in surprise. He noticed the expression."

"Yes," he said, "I have seen her, and she is with my twin sister who died many years ago. When I am laid in the earth I shall go and live with them. Shall I tell you about her? Your mother and she were like two flowers on the same stalk. She died suddenly. I was out on a bear hunt, and when seated by my camp-fire, alone, I heard a strange noise—it was something like a voice which told me to go to her. The camp was some distance, but I took my rifle and started. The night was dark and gloomy; the wolves howled round me as I went from hummock to hummock. Sounds came often to my ear—I thought she was speaking to me. At daylight I reached her camp; she was dead."

"During this recital, Nehah sat with her eyes intently fixed upon her brother—immovable almost as a statue."

"Taking from her bosom a box, she opened it and drew forth a valuable ring, saying:

"This belonged to Agnes. She gave it to me on her dying bed—take it and give it to Mr. Sidney. I even mistrusted him; but I was wrong. The old man with the smooth tongue was her betrayer, and wronged his brother; he has wronged our nation, too. I could have killed him. I have stolen behind him with a sharp knife in my hand, but I was held back by the spirit of Agnes, who told me on her dying bed to do him no harm. He has a daughter. I stole behind her once in the woods, and thought to take vengeance on him by destroying her, but I caught a glimpse of her face. She had Agnes's hair and her smile. I then threw the knife into the brook, and sat down to think of her who was dear to me as my own kindred. I am glad now I did so. You love Fanny, but her father will never permit the blood of the Ashleys to mingle with the Duponts. He seeks to injure you—he hoped the red-man would take your life in the wars, but I have watched over you. Not one of our tribe

will harm a hair of your head; but when we depart to Arkansas, whither the cruel white man has driven us, then beware! Nehah can make no promises for the other tribes. Take these things,"—handing the box to me—"these," pointing to the picture, "were the first flowers that her lover gave to Agnes. See how her little hands have preserved the memory of them. Take them to him."

"I told her the sad news which your very last letter contained."

"It is well," she said, "death is pleasant for the weary. See my brother," pointing to Coacooche. "He has no fear of death, for he talks with the spirits of the departed."

"Tell me about my mother," I said.

"Nehah's countenance softened."

"She was very lovely, but she had sickness and sorrow, and faded young. Your father was much on the sea, and she mourned for him. Poor Marguerite! She and Agnes were always near each other. They wanted me with them too. They would have sheltered and comforted me, and taken me with them over the water, where I should not have known this cruel war. The white man betrayed and murdered my father, the great King Philip—they have slain my brothers all but two, and they—'Wildcat' and 'Tigertail'—have made the blood of our enemies flow like water. I, too, have betrayed the whites, have made bullets and bow-strings to kill them. My brothers told me that I should be taken and sold like the beautiful wife of Osceola—but they could never make Nehah a slave. No, there is no African blood in Nehah. We love our slaves, we are kind to them, but we are not gentle and tame as they are. The Indian cannot be a slave to the white man. He is himself lord of the soil. We are not afraid of him, though he drives us as the autumn wind drives the fallen leaves before it."

"I did not like to have her dwell upon this subject, for I could see that her whole soul was full of bitterness and revenge. I again questioned Coacooche, asking about his tribe."

"They are brave," he said, "but the whites are too strong for us; they go by land and in boats. Our women and children must not suffer. I can live like a wolf, or a dog, but the feet of my warriors are chained. They will come to save their chief. My brother will come. I have no more to say. I am sick."

"I cannot describe to you the intense anxiety that we feel that the tribe should come in. Forty days! It is a long while for one to wait, knowing that life and death hang upon the faith of Indians who are already so embittered against the whites and so averse to leaving their native land."

"I feel a personal interest myself. I could not see so noble a man as Coacooche hung at the yard-arm. I am afraid I should turn traitor myself, and defend this oppressed nation."

"Our company will remain here during the forty days of suspense, but I shall beg hard for the fetters to be removed from Coacooche as soon as the first warriors come in. His chains are an indignity at which his proud, free soul revolts."

"Now, dear Fanny, this letter contains much which will be sad to you. I thought best to tell

you just Nehah's words concerning your father. I fear there is too much truth in her words, for I have learned since that he has been the means of depriving my grandfather of his estate, whether justly or not I cannot determine. The account of his marriage with Agnes, which I have since learned from a St. Augustine gentleman, shocked me. It is your father—and I will not enlarge upon the subject. I want to see aunt Mary and tell her many things which I cannot write. Be hopeful, dearest; life has, I believe, bright hours for us, but I must carve out our future peace with my sword. My pay is increased. I am saving it for that time, when, if your father persists in refusing his consent to our marriage, we can, with frugality, be independent of the world. He little knows the firmness of our wills, or the strength of our affection.

"Coacooche's band come in, the death-blow will be given to this war, and then I shall have a furlough. Wonder if convent walls or iron bars will be proof against my power or stratagem.

"I shall write you when this forty days' suspense is over. 'Lol the poor Indian!' You remember our old school reading-book?"

Frank's letter only confirmed all that had lately been told me, and yet there were moments when it seemed only a dream, and I clung to my faith in Maurice Perry.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROPOSAL.

ONE evening I sat alone. I did not know that the judge had returned from his trip to Boston.

I was thinking of him and the hearts he had made sad—of my own former admiration of him, and a blush of indignation kindled on my cheek. I was no pale chit then, I am sure; but I was so absorbed in thought that I did not hear any one enter, nor know that I was not alone, till I felt a hand on my shoulder, and in the same instant a kiss upon my forehead. I sprang up and confronted Maurice Perry. I know my eyes flashed then—I know my soul, with all the burning indignation there, shone out upon my face.

"Upon my soul, I thought you beautiful in your pensive mood, as you sat here a moment since, but a flash of anger brightens it amazingly. I'll try that again if I can be as well rewarded. Mary, we parted in peace, why should we meet in anger?"

"Why should we? I can tell you, sir. You deceived my husband, and wronged him, as no true gentleman would do. You profess to love, sir; perhaps you do; but I have no more love for you than had your second wife, who sleeps on yonder hillside. You were not content with the injury you did my husband; even while you were making professions of love you were robbing me. How did this paper," (taking up my husband's written communication to me, which I had been re-reading that evening,) "come in your desk?"

As I spoke he turned very white, and was evidently much surprised. But I did not stop, neither did he interrupt me.

"You, sir, who should have been the protector of the friendless, have been the persecutor. The orphan in my own house can bear witness against you; your own child—but I will stop here, for on that point I will not judge you. Enough that I would have leaned on a broken reed for support—worse, you *would* have been to me—"

"Stop," said the Judge, looking steadily at me, "not that from you. I would have cherished and loved you; I offered the highest gift man has to offer; I loved you as I have loved no woman before. Even now, in spite of your invectives, and your indignation, which becomes you well, I say again, Mary, be my wife. Not one of these charges do you believe; deceived by others, you try to think me the monster you describe. But in your heart you do not believe it. Long, long ago, you had a preference for your husband's elder brother—quiet, unassuming, modest, you concealed it, but not from my penetration. Sidney, with his unambitious nature, was not, could not be, all that your nature craves in a companion."

I had remained silent, stupefied at the man's boldness till then. "My husband's unambitious nature not congenial to me!" Ay! then and there came rushing over brain and heart the bitter memory of certain evenings long, long ago, when, absorbed in conversation with Maurice, I had forgotten everything else. Yes, then my poor, weak woman's nature *had* been fascinated by the brilliancy of the man, who, though corrupt at heart, had the power to dazzle. But contempt for my own weakness only increased my contempt for the unworthy brother, and faithless father. I forgot every thing but the discovery of his falsehood and cruelty, and I bade him never to speak to me again—he was odious to me—his very presence distasteful, and if he had ever discerned any feeling of interest on my part, it was now "to hatred turned." My determination of manner, my earnestness, must have convinced him; he stood irresolute a moment, then added:

"Very well, Mrs. Perry, you have made your own destiny; the fault is your own, the suffering also, if it comes."

"I accept the penalty of my deeds," I said.

"Good-evening, then," he said, with that imperturbable coolness of manner which always marked his conduct, but there was an expression in that cold blue eye, which made me shudder involuntarily—the demon look had returned.

Matters moved on quietly for some weeks. The inmates of the Stone House did not come to me, nor did I trouble them.

I counted the days, almost the hours, when Fanny would come. The last day was at hand. The stage came in at two o'clock P. M. Our dinner, usually at the hour of noon, was deferred till that time.

At last the horn blew, then the coach rattled over the bridge by the mill, then came more slowly up the hill, and we fancied we heard the crack of the driver's whip, for we knew the horses had quickened their pace. Now, a moment at the post-office, and then for "The Elms"! I gave one look at the dinner, and then ran to the open door, where Emma and

Sid already were. We waited. No noise of wheels! Oh, yes; there they come! No; that is Mr. North, coming from mill. Surely there has been time. We looked and waited, but no coach—no Fanny! I was troubled. What could it mean?

I put on my shawl and bonnet and walked slowly toward the village. The coach was not to be seen, but now I perceived the horses, released from the harness, led to their stable.

I waited a few minutes, and turned to the post-office. The kind postmistress noticed me, and thought I was anxious; she hastened her preparations a little, and soon handed me a letter, which I tore open as soon as I turned out of the busy street:

DEAR AUNTIE—I was all ready to go home, and was waiting only for the closing exercises of school, and my remittances, which had always been sent punctually, when I was surprised by the sudden appearance of my father. He came, he said, to settle my bills here, and take me to a French school in Canada for the coming year. You can imagine my surprise and disappointment. The school is connected with a convent. Dear auntie, how I have longed to see you and precious little Sidney! How many troubles I was to confide to you! How much comfort I was to receive from your loving heart! I shall think of you as waiting in vain for me; the little fellow will be impatient, the dinner will get cold, our hearts made sad, but our love will only be warmer and brighter. I have said I would obey my father in every thing, as far as possible, but not in that one where my happiness will be wrecked for life. So I will go resignedly to Canada—bleak, cold Canada—a great remove, my father thinks, no doubt from warm, sunny Florida. But hearts, thank Heaven, can leap all barriers of climate, and laugh at distance. In a few days think of me as in Montreal, from which place I will write as soon after my arrival as possible. Good-evening, dear auntie. I have blotted my paper with tears; they *would come*."

And I, too, dropped a few more as I read.

"Never mind, honey," said Aunt Posey, whom I found in my home, waiting to see Fanny—"never mind. It is good for the young to have trouble. I have allers observed that lovers almost generally love harder the more trouble they have. Now it is hard that the poor birdie can't come and nestle down here in the shadow of your wing; but she'll live and be happy anywhere. And now, come and eat the dinner I have kept warm for you."

"Well, Aunt Posey," I said, "We must get along without Fanny, I suppose; it will be hard, I had anticipated so much pleasure in her society."

"It is just as well, may be," said she, "for the present. I've learned to take things as they come, and trust the Lord. I've a notion that he can see a great deal further than we can, and, knowing the end from the beginning, understand what is best for us. May be, Miss Mary, God is going to purify you in the furnace of affliction a little while; but remember, honey, he knows when the gold is made pure; so trust and wait."

I did wait, very impatiently though, for letters came from Frank, and I did not know how to direct to Fanny. Some weeks elapsed, when the following short letter came:

"DEAREST AUNTIE I am so sad and lonely. Father has gone and left me among strangers in this

great stone house. Perhaps I'll like it better by and by. I am not allowed to speak at table, excepting in French, and as I am very deficient in the language, it is rather hard for me, and I do long for the freedom and pleasure of your home.

"Shall we ever hear from Florida again? My hope is faint to-day. Who knows but Frank has fallen a victim to those cruel savages? If so, then I will be contented to remain here. Yes, even just like these quiet nuns, who seem to have buried the world and all its pleasures. I can understand now how some great sorrow, some overwhelming disappointment, may touch the heart like a great, biting frost the flowers, and then the sunshine and the dew can no more make them bloom again. Write to me dear auntie—write often. Your letters cheer me, and make me more hopeful. FANNY."

How could I send her the following letters?—and yet I have always felt that the certainty of trouble was far better for the heart than the suspense which attends the fear of approaching evil.

"To MRS. S. PERRY—*Dear Madam:* I send the inclosed letters to you, as requested by Lieut. Ashley. I am sorry to inform you that he is lying very ill at Fort Brooke. He was wounded in the arm in a late encounter with the Indians, but we thought he would recover without amputation.

"A fever has, however, set in, one of those miasmatic fevers so common to this climate, and to which our soldiers are peculiarly exposed by the hardships and privations they endure. I think the result doubtful, and he seemed so anxious, last night, that I should send the inclosed to you, that I have ridden a hundred miles for the purpose of seeing that they were dispatched by the next steamer. I will write again very soon, as, even if the fever should abate, he will not be able to use his right arm for some weeks. Respectfully yours,

"ANDREW ROSS."

The following were the inclosures:

"DEAR AUNT MARY—I know you will be anxious to learn about Wildcat (Coacooche) and his band. He remained chained on board the transport, waiting with evident anxiety for his band to come in. They were very restless under their shackles, particularly Wildcat. He could ill bear the indignity. It was interesting to watch the patience and devotion of Nehah. She was no more the avenging Nemesis she had appeared, but as her brother drooped she sat near, cheering him with familiar talk in their own language.

"There was one old Indian who had been a faithful follower of King Philip, among the captives. He had offered to be one of the messengers to bring in the scattered warriors, and his services were gladly accepted.

"Surely Miceo will come," said Nehah.

"Yes," said Coacooche, "he will come if his body is not destroyed, and if it is, he will be here in spirit to tell me. I am sure of Miceo."

"Day after day we watched for the coming of these Indians, as I would wait for a reprieve from death for a friend.

"Ten days passed, and behold, Miceo! He brings with him six warriors and some women and children. Day by day now they arrive, and when at last the chief's wife and daughter—my own little favorite of the camp—came the joy of Wildcat was marked in his countenance and words.

"He tenderly loved his family, and toward women this chief was always gentle as any gentleman of the old school could desire.

"I war not against them," he often said.

"As the warriors came in, he counted them, comparing the numbers with the notches on a stick which he had cut. At last the number was all complete, and our gallant General Worth shared in the

joy of Wildcat, for I am sure that he would have signed the chief's death-warrant with a trembling hand and a sad heart.

"Now take off my irons," said the chief, "that I may meet my warriors like a man."

"They were taken off, and he placed on his honor. He then dressed himself and prepared to go on shore."

"He wore a hunting-shirt of rich colors, a crimson sash around his waist, in which was thrust a scalping-knife, red leggings and a crimson turban. On his breast were glittering silver ornaments, reminding one of the 'orders' on the breast of a gallant English knight, while three ostrich-plumes hung gracefully from his turban. He trod the soil with a haughty bearing, that said: 'Richard is himself again.'"

"Waving his arms and stretching his form to its utmost height, a shrill whoop announced his freedom, and it received a hearty response from the dusky crowd, which opened right and left. The chief strode through without regarding the presence of any one till he came near our commander, whom he saluted respectfully, and then turning, said:

"Warriors! your chief speaks to you. You have listened to my word and taken it. I thank you. The Great Spirit speaks in our councils. The rifle is hid, and the white and red men are friends. I have given my word for you. I am free; then let my word be true. I am done."

"It was a long time after this before all the women and children, and the other bands over whom Wildcat had influence, were collected. At last the number was complete—all but Tigertail, who had not yet come in. He had an interview with him and forty other warriors, who promised to be ready for Arkansas as soon as Alligator, another chief, should come with his band."

"All is now bustle and confusion in camp. The eleventh day of October is appointed as the day of sailing. The brig *Saratoga*, three hundred and fifty tons burden, was chartered, and also the steamer *James Adams*. The Indian women and girls were pounding corn to take with them, and laying up a large supply of pine knots, as they had heard that the country is destitute of wood. Some of them were in great fear lest they should be deceived by the whites, and cast overboard after they were fairly at sea. Their chief silenced their fears by his own confidence in General Worth. He was on board with all his band on the day appointed. The number in both vessels was two hundred and eleven, of whom eighty-two were warriors. Eighteen negroes accompanied them, willing slaves to their Indian masters."

"When they were all on board, the chiefs stood on the quarter-deck, gazing intently for the last time on their native land. One aged man sat with his head resting on his hands in deep thought."

"Wildcat stood on an elevation in silence, taking his last look. In reply to a question, he said:

"I am looking at the last pine tree on my land. I am now leaving Florida forever." He added: "And I can now say that I have never done any thing to disgrace it. I love it, and to leave it now is like buying my wife and child."

"I had watched Nehah during all the preparations for this journey, and supposed she was to accompany her brother."

"But just before our boat parted from the ship, I went to bid her farewell. She looked at me earnestly for a moment, gazing on my eyes, as a mother on a child."

"I do not go now," said she, "I wait for Tigertail. I shall be the last of our family to leave our native land."

"She sprang into our boat, and was allowed to go on shore. She then went in search of Tigertail's camp. I hope to see her again. She gave me the box which I saved from her burning hut, and I send it to you with its contents—the ring and picture."

"I am now ordered to the Big Cypress Swamp,

with one hundred men of the Third Artillery. It will be a hard campaign, but one of the last in this war, we firmly believe. Then—that promised furlough will come, and home—and—paradise."

These were Frank's last words—"Home and paradise." He meant another paradise than that of spirits in a world above, but I was afraid his words would be literally realized.

I sent these letters, with as much hope and comfort as I dared to give, but mourning sadly that the dear girl could not be with me in this her hour of sadness.

Weeks passed, and I heard no tidings from her, nor one word from Florida. At last I grew so alarmed about Fanny that I resolved to go all the way to Canada, to find out if any thing were wrong with her. Aunt Posey offered to keep house and take charge of little Sidney for me.

CHAPTER X.

MUCH IN LITTLE.

THE next morning I was on my way, nor did I stop till I found myself in the Ursuline Convent, asking admittance to Fanny's room.

"I am glad you have come," said the nun who attended me. "I suppose you know she is very ill. We wrote to her father three days since. Did you receive the letter?"

"Ill! Is my darling ill? Let me see her at once."

They led me to her room. There she lay, like a poor stricken flower, white and motionless, the color gone from her cheek, the light from her eye; one white hand lay listlessly on the counterpane, as if it had no strength to move itself. I was going forward.

"Stop!" said the more cautious nun, "let me announce you."

She did so. The poor child sprang up in bed and held out her arms. I gathered her to my bosom.

"My darling! my darling!" I exclaimed; "my poor one."

Her head fell on my shoulder; the tears flowed freely, but for a moment she could not speak.

"Oh, auntie, I thought you, too, had forgotten and forsaken me. I did want to see you before I died."

"Died! You are not going to die. I am going to nurse you back to health. There, lie down now, and let me smooth your hair and arrange your pillows."

She was passive as an infant. Beneath her pillow I found Frank's last letter and his miniature. Suspense, anxiety and homesickness combined had wrought this sad change in that bright and joyous being.

It was a kind providence sent me there, for my presence seemed to inspire her with hope and a desire to be well again. It seems that I had been written to at her request, but always under cover to her father. It is but justice to say, however, that he had not received them until his return home. He came on, but did not arrive until the night of the day that I saw Fanny. He was evidently shocked at the change in her appearance. Fanny held out her hand to him and smiled, but there was no

warmth in her manner, no kindling of the eye at his approach. She was feeble many weeks, and I stayed with her until the warm, sunny days of June. I think if we could have had tidings of Frank she would have rallied sooner. But none came.

Judge Perry remained but a few days in Montreal, and left word that whenever Fanny was able to travel he would come himself, or send some one to accompany her. He also left ample means for this purpose.

Time passed. I had almost forgotten my family cares at home in my anxiety for Fanny; but now I remembered that Aunt Posey would wish to go to the White Mountains, and that I must return to Burnside. Fanny was sitting in an easy-chair, looking out of the window, trying to catch the cool breeze which she said made her feel stronger, when I told of my wish to return home, and proposed writing for some one to come and take my place.

"White Mountains!" she repeated. "How cool and refreshing the very name. Auntie, I'll go there. I want to get up, up, above this world, where the air is purer and there is nothing between me and the clear blue heavens. Let me plan it now for you. See how wise I have become. Write to Aunt Posey to come to the White Mountains and bring Sidney; dear little fellow, it will do me good to see him—we will be there to meet them. This will suit my father, for he has great confidence in Aunt Posey's nursing, and it will relieve him from all care and responsibility on my account. Don't let the want of money trouble you," she said, as I began to remonstrate. "See!" and she held up a little green purse full of gold pieces. I was easily won over to this plan, and wrote to Burnside accordingly.

Emma, in reply, said that Aunt Posey was so delighted with the plan that she kept saying, "Just like Miss May—the little woman has a big heart and a long head." Poor me! I was obliged to hand over the compliment to my feeble little niece, who never thought of being wise in the least.

In a few days we were at the Mountain House. It was the morning after our arrival. I was the first to rise, and speak to Fanny:

"Come, darling, you must hasten," I said, "or you will be too late for the sunrise."

I left her to turn to the door, for I thought I heard the tramp of a new arrival. Two men were walking outside; they were so wrapped in shawls, and even furs, that I could not distinguish their features, but as they walked back and forth rapidly to protect themselves from the cold, I heard one say:

"Isn't it most time for the ladies to come out? Surely they will not miss the sunrise."

I did not listen to the reply, for there was something in the tone of the speaker's voice that arrested my attention. I thought I had heard it before, and yet it was but a dim memory. I turned back as I saw that the sky was flushing with its morning glory.

"Fanny," I said, "come, you will lose the dawning."

As I spoke the stranger came near me; he took off his fur cap and showed a face bronzed with exposure, a mass of dark hair thrown

back from a broad, high brow, a small mustache, but no whiskers.

"Madame—Mrs. Perry," he said, extending his hand.

That voice again had a familiar sound and some pleasant associations. I looked earnestly at him; he smiled, and his whole countenance lighted.

"Don't you know Frank? Frank Ashley?"

I was frightened, for verily I thought I had seen a spirit—from some dim idea of the purity of the spot and its nearness to a world of spirits. I was silent from sheer terror, I believe.

"Why, aunt Mary, am I so changed?" and as he spoke he threw his arms round me and gave me a kiss. "See," said he, "I am flesh and blood. Don't be alarmed."

"Why, Frank," I said, "we thought—we feared—"

"Yes, yes, you feared I was dead and eaten up by wild beasts in the great Cedar Swamp. But I'm here, you see—here on the top of this high hill, where I am like to be carried to heaven on the wings of mighty winds, as the ancient version hath it. I must put my cap on, begging your pardon; it's something of a change from the hot savannas and steam-heated swamps of Florida. I heard in Burnside that you contemplated a trip to the White Hills, and I followed on, arriving at the Glen House after you had been gone some five or six hours. I then hired a guide, and have had a glorious moonlight tramp up here, though I believe I should have perished had not my guide been furnished with the means of making a cup of hot coffee. But Fanny—"

"Hush!" I said, "she is here; she has been ill—very ill. Don't let this meeting be too sudden."

Before I had finished the sentence Fanny was by my side; she had heard the voice, and she, too, had believed she heard the voice of a spirit. But when she saw the figure, muffled as it was, her keener perception recognized Frank. Other strangers were coming up, and instinctively she drew back into the shelter of the house. Frank followed her into the reception-room, and there they had their first greeting.

And now that we were within doors, and in civilized garments, I could see that Frank looked worn and thin. His arm was still feeble, and the effects of that terrible climate were very marked. But we hoped much from the invigorating air and Aunt Posey's nursing.

Weeks passed, and our party still remained at the Mountain House. Frank's furlough was extended, as his health was not yet confirmed. The cold winds of September began to blow; there was snow on the mountain tops, and most of our travelers had turned homeward.

Letters passed frequently between Fanny and her father, but I was ignorant of their contents. One day I proposed to Fanny to return with me to Burnside, feeling that it was necessary for me to be at home.

"Wait a little while longer, auntie. One more letter from my father, and I will go with you."

There was a seriousness in her manner that made me anxious, but I asked no questions.

I was sitting one evening in my room, watch-

ing from my window the wonderful beauty of the clouds, when Fanny came in, and seating herself by my side, laid her head on my lap.

"Auntie, I am resolved never to part from Frank again. My father is hard, and cold, and bitter—spurns us from him. Now I am not going to ask advice. I wish my father distinctly to understand that you have neither 'aided nor abetted,' as the law hath it, in this affair. I am eighteen, and should now come into possession of my mother's fortune; but for that, no matter. Frank has his pay—small to be sure, but it suffices for all our wants. He urges me to be married at once, that he may have a right to be my protector. I do not ask others if I am wrong. I feel that no one can be my judge in this matter. All I ask is, auntie, that while Frank is on furlough we may make our home with you at 'The Elms.'"

I was not surprised at this, nor could I object, knowing as I then did the plans and character of Judge Perry. In my inmost heart I felt that Fanny's happiness was safest in Frank's hands, but I repressed any expression of this feeling, and said:

"Thank you, Fanny, for not asking advice; but of one thing be assured—my home is yours. We cannot be parted."

It was a glorious evening. The cloud scenery of sunset had filled our hearts with gladness, and now these clouds had rolled away, and the evening was so clear that the shadow of the giant mountain stretched itself slowly cut, reminding me of the powerful protection of a great king. Amid such a scene as this, in the parlor of the hotel, the man of God pronounced these two one. Simply dressed, with no ornaments save some white rose-buds, my fair, gentle Fanny, beautiful in her simplicity, stood there full of woman's holy trust in the husband of her choice.

"Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder." Fanny was safe in his love, and no power of a subtle man could make her aught than a wife.

How swiftly and sweetly passed the hours—the days! We all lived in an atmosphere of love. Then the trip to our own little home came as a beautiful episode in the drama. Once at home we felt that the hour of separation was named. Frank only awaited the summons to the field, and it came one day, while the autumn leaves were falling all over the paths trod by their lovers' feet. Frank himself brought it from the office, and as he came forward to the little gate, where Fanny awaited his return, she saw all in the sadness on his face.

"Must you go?" and the blue eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, Fanny, a soldier's first duty is to obey."

She mused a moment.

"Then I go with you!"

Surprise and pleasure were expressed in his countenance.

"Can you—will you?" he asked.

"A wife's place is by her husband's side in joy and in sorrow."

"Can you bear the hardships and the loneliness of a soldier's wife?"

"With you there can be no hardships to endure."

I heard this conversation, and knew then that there was a sad winter in prospect for me. Our little household was to be broken up. I could not object to Fanny's decision; I could not blame her for it; but it was hard to part with her.

During the winter which followed, Judge Perry did two strange deeds—he married Aunt Hannah's niece, Rosetta, and he compelled me to move out of the new house, for he had managed my husband's papers so as to bring it into his own possession. Just after moving we had letters from Florida, and thus read Frank's:

"The reduced numbers of the Indians in Florida—not exceeding two hundred and forty—would seem to indicate that all had been accomplished which can be effected by the employment of a large military force in Florida. Such a reduction of this military force as may be made consistently with the protection of the inhabitants, will, therefore, immediately be made, and the troops removed from the territory."

This was good news, but in Fanny's letter there was a minor strain that subdued our pleasure:

"I have just returned from a visit to one of the numerous keys which, you know, abound on this coast. The captured Indians are collected here, ready to embark for their home in Arkansas. It is a sad sight; they turn their eyes with such a look of despair toward their native land, that my heart aches for them. Frank brought me here to see Nehah—our mysterious visitor at Burnside. I talked some hours with her, and oh, auntie, I know now who Frank's enemy is, and why he is so. I suspected, auntie, all the while. My poor father! I feel more pity than anger that he should so yield to evil passions. He is my father—let me deal gently with his errors."

"Nehah came with her captive brother, Tigertail, a chief of great ability and some learning, understanding the English language well, and adopting our habits. He dresses neatly, and always observes the Sabbath, keeping the seventh day by notches on a stick. He is a noble chief, very tall and erect, but Frank says not as interesting as Wildcat. He sits silent and passive, with Nehah at his side, who never leaves him. His spirit is crushed and broken; I do not think he will live to reach Arkansas. Nehah says they are the last of their family that were once so powerful, and that Frank and myself, also, are all that remain of the Ashleys and Duponts that once lived so happily together on the St. John's river. I shall never forget her expression as, turning toward Florida, she raised her hand to heaven: 'The curse of the red-man is on the soil; the tears which the pale-faces have made us shed will one day swell to an ocean of blood—for God is just.'"

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